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TWO MEN

ALFRED OLLIVANT

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TWO MEN:
A ROMANCE OF SUSSEX

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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THE TAMING OF JOHN BLUNT

THE ROYAL ROAD

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BOY WOODBURN

TWO MEN:

A ROMANCE OF SUSSEX

BY

ALFRED OLLIVANT

Necessity the Spring of Faith
and Mould of Character

GARDEN CITY NEW YORK
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
1919

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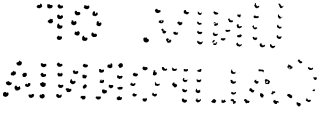

TO

BEACHBOURNE

AND THE FRIENDS I MADE THERE

1901—1911

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BEAU-NEZ

BOOK I

FATHER AND SON

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

TWO MEN

BEAU-NEZ

OLD BEAU-NEZ shouldered out into the sea, immense, immovable, as when the North-men, tossing off him in their long-boats, had first named him a thousand years before.

Like a lion asleep athwart the doors of light, his head massive upon his paws, his flanks smooth as marble, he rested.

The sea broke petulantly and in vain against the boulders that strewed his feet. He lay squandered in the sunshine that filled the hollows in his back and declared the lines of his ribs gaunt beneath the pelt.

Overhead larks poured down rivulets of song from the brimming bowl of heaven. The long-drawn swish of the sea, a sonorous under-current that came and went in rhythmical monotone, rose from the foot of the cliff to meet the silvery rain of sound and mingle with it in deep and mysterious harmony.

It was May. The sides of the coombes were covered with cloth of gold: for the gorse was in glory, and filled the air with heavy fragrance; while the turf, sweet with thyme, was bejewelled with a myriad variety of tiny flowers.

In earth and sea and sky there was a universal murmuring content, as though after labour, enduring for æons, the Mother of Time had at last brought forth her Son and, as she nursed him, crooned her thankfulness.

Out of the West, along the back of the Downs, dipping and dancing to the curve of the land like the wake of a ship over a billowy sea, a rough road swept up to the head, passing a dew-pond, the old race-course still fenced in, and a farm amid stacks at the head of a long valley that curled away towards a lighthouse pricking up white against the blue

on the summit of the cliff in the eye of the misty morning sun.

The name of the lighthouse was Bel- or Baal-tout, reminding men by its title of the god their fathers worshipped on high places here and elsewhere throughout the world with human sacrifices — the god of the Philistine of every age and country, and not least our own.

On Beau-nez itself a tall flagstaff overtopped a little cluster of white coast-guard stations, outside which a tethered goat grazed.

Beside the flagstaff stood a man, watching a tan-sailed Thames barge leisurely flapping across the shining floor of water beneath.

He too was massive: a big man with swarthy eyes set in a pale face, very sure of himself. So much you could tell by the carriage of his head, and the way he stood on his feet. He was not used to opposition, it was clear, and would not brook it; while the coat with the astrakhan collar he was wearing added to his air of consequence.

Behind him in the road stood the dingy fly and moth-eaten horse that had brought him up the hill.

The big man turned his back on the sun and walked slowly to the top of the steep coombe which overlooked the town that lay beneath him like a fairy city in the mists along the foam-lined edge of the bay, reaching out over the Levels to the East, and flinging its red-coated skirmishers up the lower slopes of the Downs.

"How the town grows!" mused the big man.

A brown excrescence on the smooth turf of the coombe beneath him caught his eye. At first he mistook it for a badger's earth; then he saw that it was a man lying on his back. The man's hands were behind his head, and his soft hat over his eyes; but he was not sleeping. One lank leg was crossed over a crooked knee, and the dangling foot kicked restlessly to and fro.

That foot was sandalled.

The man in the astrakhan coat slowly descended towards the recumbent figure. His eyes were ironical, his expression almost grim.

For a moment he stood looking down upon the unconscious dreamer whose pale brown hair peeped from beneath a hat of

a shape more familiar in the Quartier Latin than on English shores.

Then he prodded the other in the side with his toe.

The young fellow roused with a start and blinked up into the big man's face.

"Hullo, f—father," he cried with a slight stutter, and rose in perturbation: a ramshackle young fellow, taller even than his father, but entirely lacking the other's girth and authoritative presence. A soft beard framed his long face, and he was wearing the low flannel collar that in the seventies was the height of bad form.

"Just like you, Ned," said the elder with a grimness that was not entirely unkind.

The son bent and brushed his knees unnecessarily. His face twitched, but he did not attempt to answer.

"Your mother's very ill," said the big man casually. He took a letter from his pocket and thrust it towards his son.

The young man read it and handed it back.

"Is she h—happy?" he asked, his face moved and moving.

"She's away all the time — like her son," the other answered; and added more mildly —"She doesn't know any one now — not even the latest parson." He turned and climbed the hill again.

On the summit by the flagstaff he paused and looked round deliberately.

"Might build an hotel here," he said thoughtfully. "Should pay."

BOOK I

FATHER AND SON

CHAPTER I

MR. TRUPP

WHEN in the late seventies young Mr. Trupp, abandoning the use of Lister's spray, but with meticulous antiseptic precautions derived from the great man at University Hospital, performed the operation of variotomy on the daughter of Sir Hector Moray, and she lived, his friends called it a miracle, his enemies a lucky fluke.

All were agreed that it had never been done before, and the more foolish added that it would never be done again.

Sir Hector was a well-known soldier; and the operation made the growing reputation of the man who performed it.

William Trupp was registrar at the Whitechapel at the time, and a certainty for the next staff appointment. When, therefore, while the columns of the *Lancet* were still hot with the controversy that raged round the famous case, the young man told Sir Audrey Rivers, whose house-surgeon he had been, that he meant to leave London and migrate to the country, the great orthopædist had said in his grim way to this his favourite pupil:

"If you do, I'll never send you a patient."

Even in his young days Mr. Trupp was remarkable for the gruff geniality which characterized him to the end.

"Very well, sir," he said with that shrewd smile of his. "I must go all the same."

Next day Sir Audrey read that his understudy was engaged to Evelyn, only daughter of Sir Hector Moray of Pole.

Evelyn Moray came of warrior ancestry; and her father, known on the North-West Frontier as Mohmund Moray, was not the least distinguished of his line. The family had

won their title as Imperialists, not on the platform, but by generations of laborious service in the uttermost marches of the Empire. The Morays were in fact one of those rare families of working aristocrats, which through all the insincerities of Victorian times remained true to the old knightly ideal of service as the only test of leadership.

Evelyn then had been brought up in a spacious atmosphere of high endeavour and chivalrous gaiety remote indeed from the dull and narrow circumstance of her lover's origin. Profoundly aware of it, the young man was determined that his lady should not suffer as the result of her choice.

Moreover he loved the sea; he loved sport; and, not least, he was something of a natural philosopher. That is to say, he cherished secret dreams as to the part his profession was to play in that gradual Ascent of Man which Darwin had recently revealed to the young men of William Trupp's generation. Moreover he held certain theories as to the practice of his profession, which he could never work out in Harley Street. It was his hope to devote his life to a campaign against that enemy of the human race — the tubercle bacillus. And to the realization of his plans the sea and open spaces were necessary.

A colleague at the Whitechapel, who was his confidant, said one day: —

"Why don't you look at Beachbourne? It's a coming town. And you get the sea and the Downs. It's ideal for your purpose."

"It's so new," protested the young surgeon. "I can't take that girl out of that home and plant her down in a raw place like Beachbourne. She'd perish like a violet in Commercial Road."

"There's an Old Town," replied the other. . . .

In those days, Mr. Trupp kept greyhounds at the *Pelham Arms,* Lewes, and spent his Saturday afternoon scampering about Furrel Beacon and High-'nd-Over and the flanks of the hills above Aldwoldston and the Ruther Valley.

In the evening, after his sport, he would ride over to spend the night at Pole, which lay "up country," as the shepherds and carters in the Down villages still called the Weald.

One spring evening he arrived very late by gig instead of on horseback, and coming from the East instead of from the South. The beautiful girl, awaiting him somewhat coldly at the gate, was about to chide him, when she saw his face; and her frosts melted in a moment.

"My dear," he said, dismounting and taking her by both hands, "I've done it."

"What have you done?" she cried, a-gleam like an April evening after rain.

"Taken the Manor-house at Beachbourne."

Six months later Mr. Trupp was settled in his home, with for capital the love of a woman who believed in him, his own natural capacity and shrewd common sense, and a blue greyhound bitch called *She*.

CHAPTER II

EDWARD CASPAR

THE days when the parish priest knew the secrets of every family within his cure have long gone by, never to return.

His place in the last generation has been taken to a great extent by the family doctor, who in his turn perhaps will give way to the psycho-therapist in the generation to come.

Mr. Trupp had not been long in Beachbourne before he began to know something of the inner histories of many of the families about him. Those shrewd eyes of his, peering short-sightedly through pince-nez as he rolled about the steep streets of Old Town, or drove in his hooded gig along the broad esplanades of New, allowed little to escape them. Moreover he was a man of singular discretion; and his fellow citizens, men alike and women, learned soon to trust him and never had cause to regret their confidence.

It was quite in the early days of his residence in the little township on the hill that the young surgeon received a letter from Mr. Caspar, the famous railway contractor, asking him to look after — *my boy, Ned, who has seen good to pitch his tent on your accursed Downs — heaven knows why.*

Hans Caspar owed his immense success in life as much to his habit of almost brutal directness as to anything, save perhaps his equally brutal energy.

A Governor of the Whitechapel Hospital, and a regular attendant at the Board-meetings, he knew the young surgeon well, believed in him, and did not hesitate to tell the naked truth about his son.

He's not a scamp, he wrote. *Nobody could say that of Ned. He's got no enemies but himself. You know his trouble. His address is 60, Rectory Walk. Look him up.*

He won't come to you — shy as a roe-deer. But once you've established connection he'll love you like a dog. I've told him I'm sending you.

In a postscript he added,

I'll foot the bill. I keep the boy mighty short. It's the one thing I can do to help him.

Mr. Trupp, in those days none too busy, went. . . .

The Manor, a solid Queen Anne house, fronted on to the street opposite the black-timbered *Star,* where of old pilgrims who had landed from the continent at Pevensey would, after a visit to Holy Well in Coombe-in-the-Cliff under Beau-nez, pass their first night before taking the green-way that led along the top of the Downs to the *Lamb* at Aldwoldston on the road to the shrine of good St. Richard-de-la-Wych at Chichester.

Mr. Trupp, muffled to the chin — for even in those days he was cultivating the cold which he was to cherish to the end — climbed Church Street, little changed for centuries, passed the massive-towered St. Michael's on the Kneb, and turned to the left at Billing's Corner. Here at once were evidences of the change that had driven Squire Caryll to forsake the home of his fathers and retreat westward to the valley of the Ruther before the onrush of those he called the barbarians.

"They've squeezed me out, the ——!" the old man said with tears in his eyes. "But, by God, I've made em pay!".

The Manor farm had been cut up into building lots; the Moot, as the land under the Kneb crowned by the parish-church was still called, would shortly follow suit; and Saffrons Croft, with its glory of great elms that stood like a noble tapestry between the Downs and the sea, was being turned by a progressive Town Council into a public park.

At the back of Church Street old and new met and clashed unhappily; a walnut peeping amid houses, an ancient fig tree prisoned in a back yard, a length of grim flint wall patching red brick.

Here a row of substantial blue-slated houses, larger than cottages, less pretentious than villas, each with its tiny garden characteristic of its occupant, stood at right angle to the

Downs and looked across open ground to Beech-hangar and the spur which hides Beau-nez from view. A white house across the way, standing apart in pharisaic aloofness amid a gloom of unhappy-seeming trees, told that this was Rectory Walk. At the end of the Walk a new road set a boundary to the town. Beyond the road a dark crescent-sea of cultivated land washed the foot of the Downs which rose here steep as a green curtain, shutting off with radiant darkness the wonder-world that lay beyond in the light of setting suns.

No. 60 was almost opposite the Rectory.

Mr. Trupp, as he entered the gate, remarked that in the upper window of the house there was a chocolate coloured card, on which was printed in deep grooved silver letters the word *Apartments.*

A woman opened to him, but kept the door upon the chain. Through the crack he glanced at her, and saw at once that but for her hardness she would have been beautiful, while even in her hardness there was something of the quality of a sword.

"Is Mr. Caspar in?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered.

Whether the woman was surly or suspicious, he wasn't sure; but she undid the chain.

"Will you step inside?" she said, thawing ever so little. "Mr. Trupp, isn't it?"

She stood back to let him pass. Her blue overall, falling straight to her feet, showed the fine lines of her figure; her eyes met his straight as the point of a lance and much the colour of one; her lips were fine almost to cruelty, her nose fine; she was fine all through as an aristocrat, if her accent and manner were those of a small shop-keeper; and her colouring was of finest porcelain.

She showed him into the room upon the right.

The room was unusual. There was little furniture in it, and that little exquisite; no carpet, but a lovely Persian rug lay before the fire. All round the walls and half-way up them, were oak book-shelves with glass doors of a pattern new to Mr. Trupp, but designed he was sure in Germany. On the top of one of them was a Jacobean tankard with a crest upon it; in the bow a broad writing-table with the new

roll-top. On the brown wall were two pictures, both familiar to the young surgeon who was interested in Art and knew something of it: Botticelli's *Primavera* and a perfect print of young Peter Lely's famous *Cavalier* — Raoul Beauregard, the long-faced languorous first Earl Ravenwood, who died so beautifully in his master's arms at Naseby.

"I had rather lost my crown," the stricken monarch had remarked, so we all as children read in our nursery histories.

"Sire," the wounded man had answered. "You are losing little. I am gaining all. . . ."

As Mr. Trupp entered, a very tall man, smoking by the fireside, put down a volume of Swinburne, and rose. He was as unusual as the room in which he lived. Young though he was, he had a soft brown beard that suited his weak and charming face and served partially to hide an uncertain mouth and chin. It was noon, but he was wearing slippers and a quilted dressing gown, with the arms of a famous Cambridge College worked in silk on the breast-pocket. Certainly he was hardly the type you expected to find in the little room of a tiny house in a backwater of a seaside resort.

His long face had something of the contour of a sheep, and something of a sheep's expression. In a flash of recognition Mr. Trupp glanced from it to that of the love-locked cavalier on the wall above his head. Edward Caspar too had those unforgettable eyes — shy, fugitive, and above all far too sensitive. He had, moreover, the delightful ease of manner of one who has been bred at the most ancient of public schools and universities and has responded to the somewhat stagnant atmosphere of those old-world treasuries of dignity and peace. But a less shrewd eye than Mr. Trupp's would have detected behind the apparent assurance a complete lack of self-confidence.

"My father tut—tut—told me you were going to be kind enough to lul—lul—look me up," the young man said with a stutter in the perfect intonation of his kind. "It's good of you to come."

"Just looked in for a chat," growled Mr. Trupp, unusually shy for some reason.

The two young men talked awhile at random — of the

Hospital, of Mr. Caspar Senior and the Grand Northern Railway, of Beachbourne, old and new, its origin, growth, and prospects.

Then conversation flagged.

Edward Caspar, it was clear, was trying to say something and found it difficult. He stood before the fire, wrapping his dressing-gown about him, and moving elephant-wise from one foot to the other. His brow puckered; his face wrought; his eyes were on the floor.

Mr. Trupp, intuitive and sympathetic as few would have believed, gave him every chance and mute encouragement.

At last the thing came out.

"You know what my tut—tut—trouble is," said the young man, over-riding obstacles with motions of the head. "I find it hard to keep off it." He nodded to the writing-desk on which stood a soda-water syphon and a glass.

"We must see what can be done," the other answered. "You're young. You've got life before you. It's worth making a fight."

The young man showed himself troubled and eager as a child.

"D'you think there's hup—hup—hope for me?" he asked.

"Every hope," replied Mr. Trupp with the gruff cheerfulness that so often surprised his patients. "You're honest with yourself. That's the main thing. First thing we must do is to find you a job."

The other stared into the fire.

"I've got a job," he said at last reluctantly.

"What's that?"

Edward Caspar answered after a pause and much facial emotion.

"I'm writing a book on the Philosophy of M—Mysticism." He wound himself up and his speech flowed more freely. "It'll take me my lifetime. Professor Zweibrucker of Leipzig is helping me. That's why I've settled here. At least," he corrected, stumbling once again, "that's one reason why. To be quiet and near the Public Library."

Mr. Trupp nodded.

"It's the best in the South of England bar Brighton," he said. "And it'll beat that soon." He rose to go.

"Does that woman look after you properly?" he asked.

The young man's colour changed; and the momentary glow of enthusiasm roused in him as he touched on his work vanished. Edward Caspar was too weak or too honest to make a good conspirator.

He became self-conscious, and blinked rapidly as he stared at the fire.

"What — wow—woman's that?" he asked in a flustered way.

"Your landlady."

The other's face wrought. His stammer possessed him. He flapped about like a wounded bird in a tumult of fear and pain.

"What?" he said. "She? — She's all right."

He did not show his visitor to the door. Mr. Trupp noticed it and wondered: for his host's manners were obviously perfect both by nature and tradition.

In the passage was the woman who had admitted him, feigning to dust. She opened the door for him as he wound himself elaborately up in his muffler.

"D'you let lodgings?" he asked.

Those steel blue eyes of hers were on him challenging and armed for resistance.

"He's my lodger."

"Yes," said Mr. Trupp. "But have you other rooms? I see your card's up."

"Sometimes."

"Because my patients ask me now and then if I can recommend them lodgings."

The woman was clearly resentful rather than grateful.

Mr. Trupp, amused, pursued his mild persecution with the glee of the tormenting male.

"Let me see. What's your name?"

For a second the woman hesitated — baffled it seemed and fighting. Then she said with a note of obvious relief as of one who has overcome a difficulty.

"Anne, I believe."

"Thank you, Mrs. Anne, I'll remember."

He rolled on his way chuckling to himself.

The woman watched his back suspiciously from the door.

Then she retired, not into the kitchen, but into her lodger's sitting-room.

"Your father's spy," she said tartly.

"Nonsense, nonsense," the young man answered with the desperate exasperation of the neurotic. "My f—father's not like that."

CHAPTER III

ANNE CASPAR

EDWARD CASPAR, something of the scholar, something of the artist, even a little of the saint, was notoriously bad at keeping secrets.

"Old Ned leaks," his friends at Harrow and Trinity used to say. The charge was unfortunately true. It was because he had a secret it was important he should keep that, knowing his own weakness, he had settled in Old Town, to be out of danger.

Up there on the hill he would meet none of his quondam friends, who, if they came to Beachbourne at all, would go to one of the fine hotels in New Town along the sea front by the Wish.

But Nature, which has no mercy on weakness in any form, was too much for the soft young man.

It was barely a week after his first visit to 60 Rectory Walk that Mr. Trupp was sent for again.

The same woman opened to him with the same fierce, almost defiant face.

"Well?" he said.

"It's pleurisy, he says," she answered. "Pretty sharp."

He unwound himself in the passage.

"He may want a nurse then."

"He won't," cried the woman, the note of challenge in her voice. "I'll nurse him."

"Can you manage it — with your work?"

"If I can't no one else shan't," the woman snorted, almost threateningly. "First door on the left."

Mr. Trupp, grinning to himself, went up the stairs, and was aware that the woman was standing at the foot watching his back. She did not follow.

The young surgeon climbed thoughtfully, absorbing his

environment, as the good doctor does. The varnished paper on the wall, the cheap carpet under his feet, the sham drain-pipe that served as an umbrella-stand in the passage; they were all the ordinary appurtenances of the house of this class, commonplace, even a little coarse, and affording a strange contrast to the almost exotic refinement and distinction of the sitting-room on the ground floor. The house too was bright and clean as a hospital, hard too, he thought, as its landlady. There was no lodging-house smell, his nose, trained in the great wards of the Whitechapel, noted with approval. Windows were kept clearly open, sunshine admitted as a friend. He trailed his fingers up the bannisters and examined them, when he had turned the corner and was out of sight of the woman watching in the passage. Not a trace of dust! Yes, when he was in a position to start his Open-air Hostel on the cliff for tuberculous patients, this was the woman he should get for housekeeper.

He knocked at the door on the left, suddenly remembering that this must be the room in the window of which hung the chocolate-coloured *Apartments* card.

Young Caspar's voice bid him enter.

The room was a bed-room and contained a double bed. In the window, where dangled the card, was a dressing-table, and on it, undisguised, the paraphernalia of a woman's toilet.

Edward Caspar lay in bed, breathing shortly, his face pinched with physical and spiritual suffering.

Beside the bed was a chair and on it a manuscript.

Mr. Trupp glanced at the inscription — *The Philosophy of Mysticism. Part I. The History of Animism.*

"You've fuf—fuf—found us out early," gasped the young man with a ghastly smile.

"Nothing very terrible," said Mr. Trupp.

"I'm not ashamed of it," answered the other. "She's a good woman. Only my f—father's a bit old-fashioned. You see, I'm the only son."

"I don't suppose he knows," grunted Mr. Trupp.

"No, he don't know."

"And I don't see any reason why he should," continued the doctor.

Edward Caspar raised his wistful eyes.

"Thank you, Mr. Trupp," he stuttered in his pathetic and dependent way. "Thank you. Very good of you, I'm sure. We're fond of each other, Anne and I. I owe her a lot. And my father's getting an old man."

On the mantelpiece was the photograph of a lady in court dress. Mr. Trupp studied the long and refined face. There was no mistaking the type. It was Beauregard all through, exhibiting the same sheep-like contour as that of the man in the bed, the same unquenchable spiritual longings as the Cavalier in the room below — added in this case to that exasperating weakness which provokes a pagan world to blows.

"Is that your mother?" asked Mr. Trupp.

"Yes."

"She's like you."

"She's supposed to be."

When the doctor left the sick room and went downstairs he was aware that the door of the sitting-room was open.

The woman was inside, standing duster in hand, under the picture of the Cavalier, whose eyes seemed now to the young doctor faintly ironical.

Mr. Trupp entered quietly and shut the door behind him.

"We're married," she said, blurting the words at him.

"I know," he grunted.

She looked at him suspiciously.

"Did he tell you?"

"That you were married?"

"Yes."

"No."

"Who did?" fiercely.

"Your face."

She relaxed slowly.

"You mean I don't look the sort to stand any nonsense." She nodded, grimly amused. "You're right. That's me. I'm chapel." Then she let herself go. "I'm fond of Ned," she flashed. "I wouldn't have married him else, for all his family. He's *reel* gentry, Ned is. I don't mean his mother being Lady Blanche, I'm not that kind. I mean in him — here." She put her hand on her chest. "I know I'm not

his sort. But I can help him. And he needs help. Think any of *them* could support him up?" with scorn. "Too flabby by half. Can't support emselves, some of em. Lays on their backs in bed and drinks tea out of a spout before they can get up o mornings. I know. My sister's in service." She stopped abruptly. "What do you think about it yourself? Straight now."

"I think," said Mr. Trupp, sententious and dour, "the only sensible thing he ever did in his life was to marry you."

She eyed him shrewdly, sweetly. Then the hard young woman softened, and her face became beautiful, the lovely colour deepening.

She was still wearing the blue over-all in which he had first seen her.

"You see me how I am," she said.

"I can guess," answered Mr. Trupp.

"Will you see me through?"

"With pleasure."

"I don't want no one else, only you. Mr. Pigott — the schoolmaster — told me of you."

Mr. Trupp nodded.

"He's chapel too," he said.

Her eyes became ironical.

"Yes," she answered. "He's a good man though. You'll be church, I suppose. Manor-house always is."

Mr. Trupp shook his head forcibly.

"I'm an agnostic," he replied. The word, recently coined by Huxley, was on the lips of all the young men of Science of the day. "That's a kind of honest heathen," he added, seeing she did not understand.

She nodded at him with a gleam of almost merry malice.

"Hope for the best and fear the worst sort," she said. "I know em."

Then she returned to her subject, and her face became grave and sweet again.

"I'm due in April," she said.

"That's the right time," he answered. "All children should be born in the spring. Then they're greeted with a song — because Nature wants em; and they've got the

summer before them to get established in. I'll come and look you up in a day or two."

"And Ned?"

"He's all right. Keep him in bed. I'll send him round some medicine to ease the pain."

She eyed him shrewdly.

"I didn't mean that. I meant the big thing. What chance has he?"

Mr. Trupp buttoned himself up.

"He's honest with himself. That's the great thing. For the rest it depends mostly on you. You may pull him up. He's young. Is he ambitious?"

She shook her head.

"What about his writing?"

"*The Basis of Animalism,*" said Mrs. Caspar thoughtfully. "That's the essay that got him the Fellowship at King's — only he gave it up after a year. Too drudgeryfied. See where it is," confidentially, "he's got the brains, Ned has. The teachers at Cambridge thought no end of him. I've seen their letters. *You can do what you like,*— the Head Teacher wrote. *Question is — Do you like?* And that's where it is with him. There's no stay in Ned. He'll write away one day, and then drop it for a month. Then he'll paint a bit; and after that a bit of poetry. *But he don't go at it.* He don't understand work. That sort don't," with scorn. "They've no need. A man works when he's got to — and not before. Dad worked. He was a tobacconist at Ealing in a small way. Cleared three pound a week if he kept at it steady and went under if he didn't. Why should a man work when he's only got to open his mouth and the pocket-money'll drop in. 'Tain't in Nature."

Mr. Trupp nodded quiet approval.

"*Must's* the only word that matters," he said. "*Must's* the man. He's the boy to kill your *can't.*"

The woman followed him to the door.

"Of course if old Mr. Caspar knew he'd disinherit him. And Ned could never earn."

"And you'd be done?" queried Mr. Trupp with quiet glee.

"Never!" cried the woman, up in arms at once. "I could keep us both at a pinch, I'll lay then."

"I'll lay you could," answered the other. "But Mr. Caspar won't know, so you'll be all right."

The two lingered for a moment in the door, as do those who find themselves in sympathy.

"He's a hard un's Old Man Caspar," said Anne.

"And he's not the only one," grinned the young doctor. "And a good job too."

CHAPTER IV

OLD MAN CASPAR

THAT was how it came about that Mr. Trupp helped young Ernie Caspar into the world.

There was no doubt who the lad took after.

"He's his father's child," said the young surgeon.

Whether Mrs. Caspar was angry with her son for his resemblance to her husband, it was hard to say, but she was fierce even in her mothering.

Now she nodded at the photograph of the woman in court-dress upon the mantelpiece.

"It's her he favours," she said shortly, one stern eye on the sucking infant. "He's the spit of her — same as Ned. None of Old Man Caspar about *him*."

"Have you seen him?" asked Mr. Trupp, washing his hands.

"The Old Man? — Yes. Once. He came to lunch. Met Ned on Beau-nez. I was landlady that day." She nodded grimly at the window where hung the card. "That's why I keep that up — lest he should come down on us sudden. We're done if he finds us out."

Mr. Trupp grunted as he dried his hands.

"I'm not so sure," he said.

"Well, that's what Ned says," the woman retorted.

"He would," replied the surgeon.

She looked at him sharply.

"You mean Ned's afraid of the old man?"

The other didn't answer.

"You're right there," said the young mother. "He is. And I don't wonder. I'm afraid of him — and I've never feared a man before."

"Most people are," replied Mr. Trupp. "He's a bit of a terror; but he's got his points. You needn't worry," he

added as he said good-bye. "You're not likely to see much of him. He's too busy with his Grand Northern Railway."

The woman was unconvinced.

"He's that sudden," she said. "There he was in the door — me in me wrapper and all. Of course Ned never give me no warning. Too flabbergasted by half. Learnt me a lesson, though, never to sit in the back-room with my sewing about."

"Did you know him?" asked Mr. Trupp, amused.

"Know him?" cried the other. "Seen his picture in the papers time and again. Astrakhan coat and all!"

Happily for the peace of mind of the young couple Mr. Trupp proved right. All the energies of the great contractor were set on driving the new commercial railway from London to the North, tapping the Black Country, and linking the Yorkshire ports with the Metropolis by the most direct route.

It was in fact two years and more before Mr. Caspar made another of his sudden appearances at the door of 60.

Young Mrs. Caspar, one of those women who is always on her guard, guessed her visitor by that peremptory knock. She dried her hands, shut the kitchen-door on the children — there were two now; peeped into the study, saw that Edward was out, and faced the stranger.

Old Mr. Caspar was not really old: a dark, powerful man, almost magnificent, in the familiar coat with the astrakhan collar of the picture papers, and a black-and-silvered beard.

A close observer would have detected a Semitic strain in him and more than a strain of the South. In fact, Hans Caspar's father came from Frankfurt and his mother from Trieste, though he had lived in England from his earliest years and spoke without a trace of accent.

Now his dark eyes met the woman's blue ones, and seemed to approve of what they saw.

"Mr. Edward Caspar in?" he asked.

"He will be in a moment.— Mr. Hans Caspar, isn't it?"

She showed him into the little back sitting-room.

Then the task before her was to warn her husband before he came blundering in and began to coo and call to her and the children from the passage.

Anne Caspar was always at her best in a crisis.

Her baby was asleep; and Ernie was happy bestriding a new hobby-horse and chanting to himself.

She took off her apron, put on her hat, and paused a moment on the door-step, looking up and down the road.

Which way had her husband gone?

Once a week or so he went down town to consult the Public Library. For the rest he always went towards the Downs to lose himself amid the hollows of the hills. She made for the huge green wall that blocked the end of the road, shimmering and mysterious in the April sunshine. Her choice proved right. She saw him coming off the hill above Beech-hangar, and went to meet him.

He would have blundered past her, oblivious of her presence but that she stopped him.

Briefly she told him the news and gave him his instructions.

They must not be seen entering the house together.

She would return directly to the house: he must go along the new Road, down Church Street at the back, and approach by way of Billing's Corner.

Obedient as a child, he lumbered off at that curious bear-like trot of his, his sandals tapping the pavement.

Ten minutes later, when he entered the back sitting-room, he was perspiring but as prepared as such a flabby soul could ever be.

He had always been in terror of his father; and Hans Caspar saw nothing strange in his son's greeting.

"Hullo, Edward," he said in his deep voice. "Just run down to see you."

"Hullo, father," replied the son with the forced cheeriness he always adopted when addressing his sire. "You'll stop for luncheon?"

"Thank-you. If you can give me a bite."

The young man rang.

His wife came to the door.

"Mr. Caspar'll stay for luncheon," said Edward, lowering his voice appropriately. "Can you let us have something?"

"Very good," replied his wife surlily.

The father looked after her, grimly amused.

"Don't seem very obliging," he remarked.

Edward laughed uneasily.

"What!" he said. "Oh, she's all right. A bit fuf—funny in her manner. That's all."

Mr. Caspar prodded his son.

"You'd better mind your eye, Ned. She's masterful, and a fine figure of a woman too."

Edward tittered foolishly.

"What? — Oh, she — she's married. Children and all that."

"What's her husband do?"

"What — him? — Oh, he does nothing much that I know of."

"Lives on her, I suppose," growled the other. "Scoundrel! I know the sort. The kind your Gladstones encourage."

He descanted at length and with more than even his usual violence on the sins of all governments and especially radical ones. Unlike his usual self, he was clearly talking as a screen to gain time, sheltering something behind a wall of words. Ned was always embarrassed in his father's presence; but for once Mr. Caspar seemed himself uneasy in the presence of this son who had been such a woeful disappointment to him.

After his political outburst, there was a prolonged pause.

Then Mr. Caspar leaned forward and kicked a cinder into its place.

"Pretty comfortable here?" he asked at last.

"Oh, I get along fuf—first-rate," answered the son.

"Three hundred a year's not much for a man in my position to allow his only son, I know," the other said gruffly.

It was a new and unexpected note. The young man, chivalrous to the roots of him, and heir to all the qualities of his mother's family, instantly answered his father's mute appeal.

"My dear fuf—father, it's a fortune," he said. "We — I live like a prince. And anyway, it's three hundred a year more than I deserve."

His father was silent.

"I don't know if you've had any expectations from me," he said at last. "I've been pretty blunt with you in the past."

The young man had risen and was standing before the fire, his face working.

"I've no need for mum—much money," he explained. "You see I've no expensive tastes. I don't hunt or shoot or gug—gamble. If I can have enough for the necessities of life, and to buy an occasional bub—book or two, that's all I need."

"Ned," said the other, coming firmly to the point, "I've made arrangements for the three hundred a year I allow you to be continued throughout your life."

"I think it's mum—most *awfully* good of you, father," said the young man with obvious sincerity.

The other grunted.

"I don't know," he replied. "Not every son would take it that way."

He was rarely moved. His son saw it and was wretched.

Then the woman came in with luncheon.

CHAPTER V

ERNIE MAKES HIS APPEARANCE

THE little room in which they lunched looked out on a tiny back-garden bounded by a high old flint-wall. The view was limited; and yet, for those who knew, it contained much of the history of Beachbourne. Over the top of the wall could be seen the chimney-pots and long blue roofs of what was now the Workhouse, which had, Ned told his father, been a cavalry barracks in the days of Napoleon. Against the wall a fine fig-tree revealed that the new house stood where not long since an old garden, its soil enriched by centuries of the toil of man, had grown the pleasant fruits of the earth.

The room was dark but singularly clean. It was distinguished, moreover, by the complete absence of all the ordinary insignia of a lodging-house. There were no pictures on the walls. The furniture, what there was of it, was mahogany, solid and plain, the chairs and sofa horse-hair.

If the room lacked the distinction and delicacy of the study, neither was it stamped as was the rest of the house with the conventional hall-mark of the lower middle class. Rather, in its strength and its simplicity it was like the parlour of a yeoman-farmer.

The two men talked little at their meal; but all went well until they had resumed their chairs in the sunny front sitting-room that looked over to the solitary stucco house, gloomy amid trees and evergreens, behind a high wall across the road.

"The Rectory, I suppose," said the older man, standing in the bow, picking his teeth. "Always the best house in the parish. D'you know the man?"

"Just," Edward answered.

"What's his sort?"

"Oh, the ordinary cleric. A bit of a pagan; a bit of a

Pharisee; and a whole-hearted snob. He's a Prebendary who insists on being called a Canon."

His father flashed a twinkling eye at him. Just sometimes Hans Caspar wondered whether there might not be more in this poor creature of a son of his than appeared.

"How like em!" he mused. "Yet I've an immense admiration for the Church as a commercial concern. Look at the business they've built up. Look at the property they've accumulated. Look at the way the Ecclesiastical Commissioners sweat blood out of the foulest slums in Christendom. They deserve to succeed. Do it all in such style too. House their head-managers in palaces, and pay em £15,000 a year — and perks — and plenty of em. The Hanseatic League was nothing to em."

The young man's eyes became quizzical. Then he began to titter in the feeble and deprecatory way of one who half dissents and dares not say so.

The door opened quietly. Hans Caspar, standing in the bow, turned round.

A small brown-smocked figure, a-stride a dappled grey horse, looked in; and a lovely little singing voice like that of water pouring from a jug, said in a slight stutter with mysterious intimacy,

"Daddy!"

The little lad stood smiling in the door, the image of his father, of his father's mother, of the Cavalier upon the wall, of those high-bred, rather ineffective faces that look down on visitors from the famous portrait-gallery at Ravensrood, the Somersetshire home of the Beauregards.

Edward Caspar sat and sweated.

It was of course the elder man who spoke first.

"Hullo, youngster!" he called cheerily. "What might be *your* name?"

The child's face wrought just like his father's, as he struggled with some invisible obstacle.

"Ernie Gug—gug—Gaspod," he said at last.

"Ernie Gaspipe," laughed the other. "Is your daddy a plumber?"

The child's hand left his horse's mane and shot out a chubby finger.

"That's my dad—daddy," he said.

There was the sound of swift feet in the passage, a blue arm reached fiercely forth, and the child was swept back to the kitchen.

Mr. Caspar's eye flashed on his son's grey and quaking face and flashed away again.

"Nice-looking kiddy," he said calmly. "Just the age to take us all for his dad."

"Yes," panted Ned, his moist hands gripping the arm of his chair.

"How many's she got?"

"Two, I believe."

"Boys?"

"Yes, both."

The father took a cigar leisurely from his case, cut it and began to smoke.

"I'd have liked a large family," he said quietly.

The son raised his eyes of a hunted hare.

"I know, father," he stuttered. "I'm afraid I've been a great dud—disappointment to you."

"Stop it!" grunted the other. "Or I'll go into the kitchen." He puffed away, lost in his reflections. "It was your mother," he went on. "She couldn't stand the racket. That sort can't. The English aristocracy breed in and in too much. That's why they always fail. No red blood in em." He added, after a pause, "*You* almost killed her; and you were only a five-pounder when you were born. . . ."

Before he left Mr. Caspar did go into the kitchen alone.

"I'm going to give that woman half-a-sovereign," he explained. "She gave me a decent luncheon."

He went down the passage and knocked at the kitchen-door.

"Come in," said a voice.

He entered.

The woman faced him, formidable as a tigress guarding her cubs.

Her enemy eyed her with something more than kindness.

"I've seen one child," he said with the charm he could assume at will. "Where's tother?"

His manner disarmed her. Half-hidden behind a towel-

horse was a cot. Anne Caspar stood aside while the big man bent over the sleeping child.

"Ern's all right," she said. "This'n's not much to talk on — as yet. I'd not have rared him only for Mr. Trupp."

"Mr. Trupp's a great man," said the other, and laid two sovereigns on the table.

"One for each of em," he explained.

The woman coloured faintly.

There was about her the beauty of a clear and frosty day.

"Thank-you," she said.

He held out his hand.

She took it, and he would not let it go, those eyes of his, in which light and darkness, cruelty and kindness, chased each other, engaging hers.

"Good-bye," he said. "I don't know what your name is — Look after *him*." He jerked his head towards the door. "He needs it."

The woman dropped her eyes, the lovely colour deepening in her cheeks.

"I'll try," she said, her natural surliness dashed with ungracious graciousness.

In the passage he put on his coat.

Edward came out to him.

"Good-bye, Ned," he said. "Good luck," and put his hand almost affectionately on his son's shoulder. "I'm going down to look in on Trupp and curse him from the Board for leaving the Whitechapel. Damn tomfoolery. He'd a career before him, that man."

CHAPTER VI

THE MANOR-HOUSE

WHEN he left his son to carry out his threat, Mr. Caspar struck into the steep main street of Old Town, which preserved still the somewhat stagnant atmosphere of a country village. On the left the parish church, square-towered, massive, grey, stood on a slight eminence over a green hollow, called still the Moot, in which was a pond that may have been the source of the original bourne. Beneath the church the old *Star* inn hung its signboard across the way. Here Borough Lane crossed the street, running steeply down between the church and the inn and as steeply up under noble beech-trees along the garden-wall of the Queen Anne mansion which must clearly be the Manor-house.

The brass-plate on the door confirmed the visitor's conjecture.

Yes; Mr. Trupp was in.

The house was beautiful within as it was plain and solid outside. In the hall wainscoted, spacious, and with shining oaken floors, a grandfather's clock swung its pendulum rhythmically.

The room into which Mr. Caspar was shown had a wide bow-window looking out over gracious lawns and laburnum-trees in blossom to the elms in Saffrons Croft.

Mr. Trupp entered. He was a slight man with a moustache, who tilted his shrewd, rather sharp face to inspect his visitor through pince-nez.

"Well, Mr. Caspar," he growled genially.

"Ah, you runagate!" scolded the other. "What d'you mean by it?"

The doctor nodded at the window.

A beautiful young woman with chestnut hair, bare to the

sun, was walking with extreme deliberation across the lawn, leaning on the arm of a nurse.

"That's one reason," he said.

The other gazed.

"Yes; you've given her the right setting," he remarked at last in a strangely quiet voice, touched with melancholy.

A greyhound emerged from a shrubbery and crossed the lawn after the two women at a stealthy trot.

"That's another," said Mr. Trupp.

"Sport!" cried the other. "Bah! — and you might have been a great man! — a credit to the Whitechapel. What's the next?"

"Professional," grunted the Doctor.

"Third and last of course," retorted the other. "That's you English all over. You don't know what work is. Still, Old Town for your wife and New Town for your practice — may be something in it after all."

The surgeon opened the window.

"Come and be introduced," he said, and led the way across the lawn. "She'd like to meet you."

Mrs. Trupp showed herself delightfully shy in her large and royal way. Mr. Caspar was Mr. Caspar; and the fair creature knew the secret of Mr. Caspar's son. She was indeed the only woman in Beachbourne who knew it, and that not because Mr. Trupp had told her, but because she was the only woman in whom Anne Caspar had confided,— as had, in fact, Edward too. Her meeting therefore with Mr. Caspar senior was full of dramatic possibilities. Her innocent soul thrilled with pleasurable alarm at the perilous character of the situation. She felt a little guilty and wholly defensive; and her transparent face betrayed every emotion as a pool reflects a cloud.

Mr. Caspar watched her as she worked, with admiration and amusement.

"You've come down to see your son, I expect," she said in her charming leisured voice.

"I have," he answered brusquely, the light flashing in his eyes. "He seems snug enough. Not bad lodgings."

"As lodgings go," said Mrs. Trupp, delicately, bending over her work as her colour came and went.

"That's a queer creature," continued Mr. Caspar.

"Who?"

"The woman my son's lodging with."

Mrs. Caspar held up her work to inspect it.

"She *is* a little funny in her manner," she replied, and began to pride herself on her skill in evading the enemy without telling a downright lie. "She's a fine cook, I believe."

"She's a fine woman," said Mr. Caspar.

The beautiful creature tossed her head as though he was suggesting something improper, which no doubt he was.

Mr. Caspar chuckled without shame or mercy; but as he walked back to the house his mood changed.

"Well," he said gravely, "I congratulate you, Trupp. Children may be the greatest blessing in a man's life."

Back in the consulting-room he was still very quiet. All the teasing laughter was gone from him. The mischievous boy, the trampling conqueror, had disappeared. Their place had been taken by a sad and even pathetic man.

"What is it?" asked Mr. Trupp, as his visitor sank back in the big chair.

"I'm sick as herrings," replied the other.

"Labour troubles?"

The big man, with his black hair, pale face and swarthy eyes, shook his head.

"I wish it was." He put his hand to his heart. "I've got notice to quit. Rivers gives me eighteen months at most. Damn nuisance." He stared out of the window at the two women under the elm. "I don't feel like dying. And there was so much to do."

"Let's see," said the Doctor.

He applied the stethoscope, and then replaced it in his pocket without comment. It was clear from the negative expression of his face that he agreed with Sir Audrey Rivers' judgment.

Mr. Caspar, intuitive as his friend, asked no questions.

"That's it," said he. "Machine wearing out. I've rattled her about too much, I suppose. Well, a man must live — my sort of man at least. I could never be content to rust. There's nothing to be done. It's just good-bye and no *au revoir* this time. That's why I came down. I wanted to

see the boy before I pushed off." He turned suddenly. "How's he getting on?"

Mr. Trupp shrugged his shoulders.

"No improvement?" asked the other.

"I wouldn't say that. He's put the brake on a bit of late."

"Or had it put on for him," muttered Mr. Caspar.

He mused for some time.

"I'd have taken a peerage but for him," he said at last. "I can't see Ned as a hereditary legislator."

"Oh, I don't know," mumbled Mr. Trupp. He was an aggressive radical of the then active school of Dilke and Chamberlain. "I think he'd do very well in the House of Lords."

The young man had touched the springs of laughter in the other's heart. Hans Caspar's immense vitality asserted itself again. He resumed himself with a shout, sweeping the clouds boisterously away.

"Ned's a true Beauregard," he said. "Just his mother over again. So charming and so ineffectual! Always some weak strain in an hereditary aristocracy."

"Must be," muttered Mr. Trupp. "They're never weeded out. They're above the laws of Nature. Case of Survival of the Unfittest — protected by Law and living on you and me to whom they dictate the Law. Albino bunnies in a gilded hutch with a policeman watching over em!"

"Good!" cried Mr. Caspar. "Albino bunnies is good. It took my albino in the way of religious orgies. I prefer Ned's trouble of the two. Less humbug about it." He got up and began restlessly to pace the room. "There's nothing like religion to eat a man's soul away, Trupp — to say nothing of a woman's. *You* don't let your wife go to church, I understand. Well, you're a shrewd fellow. That way lies the bottomless pit. Mine took to it — it was in her blood, mind you — when I was away in the River Plate driving the Trans-Argentine Railway from the Atlantic to the Pacific. When I came back — good Lord! Priests to luncheon, Bishops to dinner, Deaconesses to tea. Missionary meetings in the drawing-room, altars in the alcove, parasites everywhere. In her last illness she *would* have a *religeuse* to see

to her instead of one of our nurses from the Whitechapel. Of course she died. Serve her right, too, say I." He paused. "With Ned it was just touch and go which way it would take him. I thought at one time his mother's trouble'd got him, but in the end it was . . ." He jiggled his elbow.

"He's not a bad sort," muttered Mr. Trupp.

Hans Caspar took the other by the lapel of his coat.

"But that's just what makes me so mad, man!" he cried. "If he'd been vicious I could have kicked his back-side with joy. But you couldn't kick Ned. You can't kick a pathetic vacuum." He added with a swagger: "No man can accuse Hans Caspar of being afraid to use the jack-boot. You don't kick bottoms half enough in England."

"There's plenty of kicking bottoms," answered the other. "The trouble is that the men who kick bottoms never get their own kicked. If every man who kicked knew for certain that he would automatically be kicked in his turn, we might get on a bit."

Hans Caspar chuckled.

"Your idea of Utopia," he said. "Everybody standing round in a circle, with his hands on the shoulders of the man in front, hacking him. I like it."

"I believe," chanted Mr. Trupp, "in the Big Stick. That's my creed. But I want it applied by everybody to everybody — not by the strong to the weak as we do in this country, and you do in yours."

"My firm belief you're this new-fangled creature — a Socialist," said Hans Caspar.

"What if I am!" grunted the other. In fact, in London he had attended meetings of the recently born Fabian Society, and had heard William Morris preach on Sunday evenings in the stables of Kelmscott House. The young surgeon had found himself in general sympathy with the views expounded, but like many another man could not tolerate the personalities of the expounders of the new creed. "Apart from Morris, they're such prigs," he would say, "and so blatant about it. Always thrusting their alleged intellectual superiority down your throat. And after all, they're only

advocating what every sensible man must advocate — the application of the method of Science to the problems of Government."

Mr. Caspar had gone to the window and was staring out.

"How long'll that boy of mine last the pace he's going?" he asked, subdued again.

"He might last thirty years yet," the other answered.

Hans Caspar turned round.

"With that woman to run him, you mean?"

"What woman's that?"

"His wife."

It was Mr. Trupp's turn to look away.

"She's the sort for him," he mumbled warily.

The other broke in with vehement enthusiasm.

"The sort for him! — why, if I'd married a woman like that — with a back-bone like steel, and the jaws of a rat-trap — I'd have been a Napoleon."

Mr. Trupp's face was still averted. Its naturally shrewd expression had for the moment a satirical touch.

"You think he's a lucky fellow to get *her*?" said the other.

Mr. Trupp's silence was eloquent enough.

"Ah," continued Hans Caspar knowingly. "I see. You think *she* got him. I dare say. She's the sort of woman who'd get anything she wanted. And he's the kind of man who'd be got by the first woman who wanted him. I took the measure of her at first sight. Fact I was just going to offer her the job of manageress of my canteen at rail-head — when I found out. She'd make the navvies sit up, I'll swear."

"Her hands are pretty full as it is," commented Mr. Trupp.

The other nodded.

"I expect so," he said. "Ned alone's one woman's job. And the two children." He put his hand on the surgeon's arm. "That eldest boy, Trupp!"

"What about him?"

"He's his grandmother over again. Watch him!"

A bell in the street clanged.

"What's that?" he asked.

"Station-bus," said Mr. Trupp. "The driver strikes the coaching-bell over the *Star* as he passes."

"I must catch it."

The big man put on his coat and went out. At the door of the inn a two-horse bus was drawn up.

Mr. Caspar climbed up beside the driver.

The young surgeon closed the front-door and turned.

His wife stood framed in the garden-window against a background of green.

"Did he find out?" she asked anxiously.

"My dear," her husband answered, "he did."

The tender creature's face fell.

"Oh, the poor Caspars!" she cried.

CHAPTER VII

HANS CASPAR'S WILL

SIR AUDREY RIVERS' diagnosis proved correct. Just a year after his visit to Beachbourne Mr. Caspar died.

His will caused malicious merriment to those who knew "Unser Hans," as he was called in Society.

He left the bulk of his vast fortune in trust for the Whitechapel Hospital — with one proviso: that no clergyman was to act as a trustee. For the rest he bequeathed £300 a year for life, free of Income Tax, to his daughter-in-law, Mrs. Edward Caspar; and should she pre-decease her husband, the sum was to be continued to his son.

"Sound fellow that," said Mr. Trupp, when he heard. "Old Man Caspar to the end."

"It's rather hard on *our* Mr. Caspar," remarked his wife, who had known Edward Caspar in London before either had married.

"My dear," replied the surgeon, with the slight sententiousness peculiar to him, "the only way to help that sort of son is to be hard on him."

"I hope you'll never help my Joe like that," cried the beautiful woman warmly.

Mr. Trupp loved to tease his wife.

"If your Joe goes that way I will," he grinned —"and worse. So mind your eye!"

Another woman who was not amused by Hans Caspar's will was the woman who benefited by it.

Anne Caspar had the qualities of her kind. If she was hard, she was passionately loyal and genuinely devoted to her Ned. When she had told Mr. Trupp that her marriage had been a love-match she had but spoken the truth as regards her part in it. Therefore on the morning she opened the letter from the lawyers announcing that she had come by

miracle into what was for the daughter of the Ealing tobacconist a fortune, she felt a slight had been put upon her husband and was perturbed accordingly.

With pensive face she went into the study, wearing the long blue over-all in which Edward Caspar had first seen her.

Her husband stood in his shirt-sleeves, pipe in mouth, a loose, round-shouldered figure, splashing away with vague enthusiasm at a canvas in the sunny bow-window.

She realized in a moment that she had caught him in one of his rare uplifted moods.

"Ned," she said.

"What-ho, my Annie!"

"Your father's left us £300 a year."

He chuckled as he painted, one eye on the gleaming mystery of the Downs.

"Been opening my letters, you burglar?"

"The letter's to me."

This time he turned, saw her face, and steadied.

She offered him the envelope.

He glanced at the address.

"Yes, it's to you all right. Funny they didn't write to me."

"Won't you read it, Ned?" she said gently.

He skimmed the contents and winced.

"That's all right, Anne," he said, handing it back to her, and patting her hand. "The old man's been as good as his word — and better, by the amount of Income Tax."

"Such a way to do it and all," said Anne censoriously.

He pinched her arm.

"Perhaps it's for the best," he said. "And anyway, it doesn't much matter." If Edward Caspar was by no means sure of himself, he was sure beyond question of the woman life had given him.

She lifted her face to his, and it was beautiful.

"Ned," she said; and he kissed her.

BOOK II

THE TWO BROTHERS

CHAPTER VIII

BEACHBOURNE

THE Domesday Book tells us that King Edward the Confessor held the Manor of Burne, and gave the endowment of the Church of St. Michael to the Abbey of Fécamp, along with the Lordships of Steyning and Rye and Winchelsea and other jewels from the crown of Sussex; as all who have read Mr. Dudgeon's scholarly history of Beachbourne will recall.

Harold cancelled the grant, with the result, so legend has it, that William the Norman landed at Pevensey just across the way to enforce restitution. In those days the parish of Burne covered like a blanket the western promontory of the great Bay. At each of the four corners of the blanket, holding it down as it were, was a rude hamlet. On the bourne itself a few hovels clustered round the wooden church upon the Kneb; in Coombe-in-the-Cliff, carved out of the flank of Beau-nez, was Holy Well, haunted by pilgrims from the Continent; on the sea-front there was the Wish, beneath which of old a Roman dock had been; and further east was Sea-gate with its fishing-station and the earth-work which guarded the entrance to the Bay whose waters swept inland over what are now the Levels to Ratton and Horsey and the borders of Hailsham.

In the reign of Henry II the Norman church, much as we know it to-day, succeeded the crazy wooden building in which our Saxon forefathers heard the Word of the Promise first brought to Sussex by Bishop Wilfrith, who starting from the North, dared the perils of the Forest, and somehow fought his way through brake and marsh and thicket, among wild beasts and wilder men, to the ancient Roman settlement at Chichester; thence to spread the news all along the high bleak coast-line on which at river-mouths and lagoon-like estuaries the Saxon adventurers had gained a footing.

Till the nineteenth century the parish that lay scattered thus between the Downs, the marshes, and the sea, changed but little, experiencing the ordinary vicissitudes of an English village. Bishops made their visitations. Rectors lived and died. Outlaws sought sanctuary at the altar of the church above the Moot, which was still the centre of the life of the little pastoral community. In the last half of the fourteenth century the massive tower was added which dominated the village as it dominates the town to-day; built perhaps as a thank-offering for the passing of the Black Death, which slew half the population, reduced the monks at Michelham to five, and, with indiscriminating zeal, laid a clammy hand on the Abbot of Battle and Prior of St. Pancras, Lewes; while giving rise to a wave of industrial unrest which a few years later sent the rebellious men of Sussex Londonwards behind the ragged banner of Jack Cade.

In 1534 the Proclamation repudiating the Pope was read from the pulpit of the church upon the Kneb; and ten years later the first outburst of Puritanism stripped the consecrated building of many shrines, pictures, ornaments, as our historian has recently reminded us.

The village thrilled to the threat of the Spanish Armada, and, what is more, prepared to meet it; the inhabitants having — time out of memory of man, we are told — a reputation, the outcome of experience and necessity, for dealing with the landings of forraine enemies.

During the Parliamentary troubles the Squire of Beachbourne was of course a stout-hearted Royalist; and his friend the Rector was brought up before the authorities on a charge of "malignancy." Found guilty, he was removed from office; whereupon, as his brass quaintly reminds us, the gallant gentleman *mori maluit* — preferred to die. And it is on record that the parish was only saved from the ravages of Civil War by the abominable condition of the roads of East Sussex. Perhaps the same factor told against the prosperity of the place. For, by the middle of the eighteenth century, Beachbourne, as it was now called, had dwindled in population to a few hundred souls. Later in the same century, about the time Newhaven was born, it began to blossom out as a health resort. A celebrity or two discovered its re-

mote charm. A peer succeeded the Squire at the big house. Behind the Wish a row of sea-houses sprang into being on the front. But Dr. Russell of Lewes and the Prince Regent, in turning the fishing-village of Brightelmstone into fashionable Brighton, ruined for the moment its rival under Beaunez. Beachbourne had to wait its turn until the iron horse, running on an iron road, across country that not long since had been washed by tides, overcame with astounding ease the difficulties that teams of snorting oxen up to the hocks in mud had found insuperable.

Then, and only then, the four corners of the parish came together apace. The old bourne disappeared, the source of it in the Moot under the church-crowned Kneb now no more than a stagnant pond. And by the time of our story a city of tens of thousands of inhabitants had risen where men, still middle-aged, could recall meadows that swept down to the sea, the voice of the corn-crake harsh everywhere as they sauntered down Water Lane of evenings after church, and the last fight of the " gentlemen " and the Revenue Officers that took place on a desolate strip of shore to the sound of calling sea-birds, on the site of what is now the Cecil Hotel.

CHAPTER IX

THE TWO BOYS

NEXT time Mr. Trupp called at 60 Rectory Walk, he marked that the familiar chocolate notice in the upper window had gone.

He chaffed Mrs. Caspar in his grim way.

"No more rooms to let, I see," he said.

"No," the woman answered. "No more lies to have to tell just at present."

She was in one of her tartest moods; and when he congratulated her on being through her troubles, she answered,

"Some of em. Plenty more to follow. There'll be enough money for Ned and me and the boys. That's one thing."

"And a big thing too," said Mr. Trupp.

"The biggest," admitted the woman surlily. "Speaking worldly-wise, I don't say nay to that."

After the birth of her second son, Mr. Trupp had told her that she would have no more children and she was glad: for her hands were going to be full enough throughout her life; so much the shrewd woman saw clearly. There was her husband; and there was her eldest son, Ernie, who was his father over again.

He had his father's face, his father's charm, his father's soft and generous heart; and, unless she was mistaken, other qualities of his father that were by no means so desirable. And the curious thing was that the characteristics which in her husband Anne Caspar secretly admired, only exasperated her in Ernie.

Alf, the second son, whatever his faults, certainly did not trace them to his dad. He was as much his mother's child as Ernie was his father's. And whether for that reason or because for years she had to wrestle for his miserable little

life with the Angel of Death, his mother loved him with the fierce, protecting passion of an animal.

"Nobody but his mother could have saved him," Mr. Trupp told his wife.

While Mrs. Caspar said to the same lady,

"But for Mr. Trupp he wouldn't be here."

A proud woman, Mrs. Caspar was also a very lonely one. Her genuine pride in her rather ramshackle husband — his birth, his breeding, his obvious air of a gentleman — which evinced itself in her almost passionate determination that he should dress himself "as such," prevented her from associating with her own class; and the women of her husband's class would not associate with her. Mrs. Trupp, the kindest of souls, was the solitary exception. But the two women were antipathetic. The doctor's wife, who possessed in full measure the noble toleration that marks the best of her kind, was forced to admit to her conscience, that she could not bring herself to like Mrs. Caspar. The large and beautiful nature of the former, brought to fruition in the sunshine and shelter of a cultivated home, could not understand the harsh combativeness of the daughter of the small tobacconist, who had fought from childhood for the right to live.

"She's like a wolf," Mrs. Trupp told her husband. "Even with her children."

"My dear," said the wise Doctor, "she's had to snap to survive. You haven't. Others have done your snapping for you."

"She needn't snap and snarl at that dear, gentle husband of hers," retorted Mrs. Trupp.

"If she didn't," replied her husband drily, "she'd be a widow in a week."

"Anyway she might be kind to that eldest boy," continued Mrs. Trupp, who at Edward Caspar's request had stood sponsor to Ernie. "He's beautiful, and such breeding. A true Beauregard."

"What d'you make of the baby?" asked her husband with sudden interest.

"Why, he's like a little rat," answered Mrs. Trupp. "He's the only baby I've ever seen I didn't want to handle."

"Yet there's something in him," replied the other thought-

fully. "He wouldn't have lived else. A touch of Old Man Caspar about that child somewhere. *He'll* bite all right if he lives to be a man."

And to the Doctor's shrewd and seeing eye it was clear from the start that Alfred meant to live to be a man. Somewhere in the depths of his wretched little body there glowed a spark that all the threats and frosts of a hostile Nature failed to extinguish. On that spark his mother blew with a tenacity surpassing words; Mr. Trupp blew in his wise way, working the bellows of Science with the easy skill of the master-workman; little Ernie, most loving of children, blew too. Even Edward Caspar leaned over the cot in his quilted dressing gown and said,

"He's coming on."

But even as he leant, the sensitive fellow knew that there was not and could never be any bond between him and his youngest born. His heart was with Ernie. And the way his mother rebuffed the elder lad, only endeared him the more to his father.

The two lads grew: Ernie strong in body, loving in heart, lacking in will; Alf ardent of spirit, ruthless as a stoat upon the trail, and rickety as an old doll.

There was a first-rate elementary school in Old Town to which the two boys went when the time came. The headmaster, Mr. Pigott, was also manager of the chapel in the Moot which Mrs. Caspar attended regularly.

The hard woman was religious in the common Puritan way, so dear to the English lower-middle-class of her generation. Her Chapel and her God were both a great deal to the austere woman, especially the former. She had a stern and narrow moral code of her own which she mistook for love of Christ. From that code she never departed herself, and punished to the utmost of her power all those who did depart from it.

In a chapel of her own denomination she had insisted on being married, in spite of the fact that she risked by her obstinacy losing the only man she had ever loved.

Ned Caspar, for his part, took his religion, as most of us do, from his mother. He was High Church at a time when

to be so was far less fashionable than it is at present. He called himself a Catholic, and spoke always of the Mass in a way that shocked his fellow-churchmen who were in those days still content to speak of themselves as Protestants and the sacramental act as Holy Communion. And after marriage he maintained his position with a far greater tenacity than most would have expected of the soft-willed man. Indeed, it was the one point on which, aided by his mother's memory, he stood up to his wife for long.

"I'll wear you down yet, my son," Anne told him grimly. "May as well come off the perch now as later."

In this one matter her taunts served only, so it seemed, to strengthen her husband's resistance.

He went white, shook, perspired, and continued to attend High Mass at St. Michael's, in spite of his growing distaste for the man who administered it — his neighbour, Prebendary Willcocks, across the road.

A far wiser woman than she seemed, Mrs. Caspar recognized her mistake, desisted from her original line of attack, and let her husband go his own way for a time without protest — as the cat permits the mouse a little liberty.

When she began to take the children to chapel with her, she said — and Anne Caspar could be beautiful upon occasion —

"Ned, I wish you'd come along with me and the boys sometimes. I do feel it so that we never worship in common."

That was the beginning of the end of his resistance.

He became an occasional attendant at the chapel, if he could never bring his aesthetic spirit, seeking everywhere for colour, harmony and form, to become a professed member of the rather dreary little community.

And later, for quite other reasons, he dropped St. Michael's entirely.

But for twenty years after he had ceased to call himself a member of the Church of England, often of Sunday afternoons in the spring and summer he would take the train to London Bridge, and wander East on the top of a dawdling bus, to find himself, about the time most churches close their doors, outside St. Jude's in Commercial Street, the "chuck-

ers in" already busy at their work among the street-roughs and fighting factory girls. Edward Caspar was not a "chucker-in" himself; but when the quiet doorkeeper of the House of the Lord opened it at 8.30 he was of the first to enter the lighted church, the side-aisles of which were darkened that tramp and prostitute might sit there unnoticed and unashamed. And in that motley assembly of hooligans from the East End, of respectable artisans from streets drab as their inmates, of intellectuals from Toynbee Hall, and occasional visitors from the West End, he would join in that irregular and beautiful Hour of Worship, of song, silent meditation, solos on organ or violin, extempore prayer, readings from Mazzini, Maurice, Ruskin, and Carlyle, that made him and others dream of that Society of the Redeemed which in days to come should gather thus, without priest or ceremonial, simply to rejoice together in the blessing of a common life and universal Father.

CHAPTER X

OLD AND NEW

EDWARD CASPAR went occasionally to chapel in order to gratify his wife. He ceased attending church because his always growing spirit, intensely modern and aspiring in spite of its inherent weakness, no longer found satisfaction in the ornate ritual, the quaint mediæval formulæ, the iterations and reiterations of the sacerdotalism which had held his mother in its grip.

As a student of comparative religion his intellect was still interested in forms which his seeking mind had long rejected as empty, ludicrous, or inadequate.

His reading for his book, his experience of life, and most of all an inner urge, led him in time to look for the spiritual comfort that was his most vital need outside the walls of the consecrated prison in which he had been bred.

Quia fecisti nos ad Te cor nostrum inquietum est donec requiscat in Te was the motto that hung above his writing-desk. And his restless heart found increasingly its peace sometimes in music, sometimes amid the hum of men and women in the crowded streets of the East End of the town, and most often in quiet communion with Nature on the Downs or beside the sea in some gap far from the haunts of men.

He would ramble the lonely hills by the hour, lost in thought, Ernie skirmishing about him.

Sometimes Mr. Trupp, riding with his little daughter up there between the sky and sea, would meet the couple.

"Like a bear and a terrier, Bess," he would smile.

Then in some secluded valley, father and son would lie down in the "loo" of the hill, as Ernie called it.

Resting there with contented spirits amid the gorse, they would watch the gulls, white-winged and desolately crying over the plough, while the larks purred above them.

These were the best moments of Ernie's childhood, never to pass from him in the tumult and battle of later life. A child of the earth, even his tongue, touched with the soft slur of Sussex caught from school-mates, betrayed him for a countryman. He loved the feel of the turf solid beneath him; he loved the sound of the gorse-pods snapping in the sun; he loved the thump of the sea crashing on the beach far below; and most of all he loved the larks pouring comfort into the cistern of his mind until it too seemed to brim with the music of praise.

"Loving, idn't they?" he would say in his sweet little voice, his hands behind his head, his eyes on a speck of song thrilling in the blue.

"That's it, Boy-lad," his father's answer would come from beneath the cavern of his hat; and Edward Caspar forthwith would repeat, in a voice that seemed to co-ordinate the harmonies of earth and sky and sea, Wordsworth's *Lines above Tintern Abbey:*

. . . That serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,—
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:

Alf never came on these excursions. The bent of the two brothers was indeed entirely different. If they left the house together, as often as not they parted at the garden-gate. Ern turned his face towards the green hills that blocked the end of the road, Alf turned his back on them.

"Nothin doin there," he would say with a knowing wink. He hated walking, and he feared the loneliness of the hills. His heart was in the East End of the growing town. Down there, beyond the gas-works, at the edge of the Levels, where the trams clanged continually, where you heard strange tongues, and saw new types of faces, Alf found himself. The little urchin, who seemed all eyes in a hideous square head, would wander by the hour in Sea-gate, among the booths and barrows, drinking in the life about him, and return home at night tired but contented.

In bed the two boys would compare their experiences.

"What did you see?" Ern would ask.

"Everythink," Alf would answer. "Folks and a fight and all."

"I see something, too," said Ernie, deliberate alike of speech and mind.

"What then?" asked Alf, scornfully.

"I see angels," Ernie answered. "Dad see em too."

But Alf only sniggered.

At that time Old Town hung, as it were, between the Past and the Future. It had not shaken off the one, and yet could not resist the other. Beneath it was New Town, a growing industrial city, absorbing workers of every kind from every quarter; stretching back from the sea to Rodmill and overrunning the marshes at an incredible speed; with the slums, the Sunday agitators, the Salvationists and reformers, the rumble of discontent, that mark the cities of our day. Beyond it lay the immemorial countryside with shepherds on the hills, oxen ploughing in the valleys, villages clustered about the village-green, the squire, the public-house, the parish-church as in the days of Elizabeth. Old Town still slept upon its hill about the parish-church, but the murmur of the ungainly offspring at its feet disturbed slumbers that had endured for centuries. In its steep streets you might hear the undulating Sussex tongue, little changed from Saxon times, clashing in vain conflict with the aggressive cockney phrase and accent which is conquering the British Isles as surely, if as slowly, as did the English of the men of the Elbe in by-gone days.

Ernie was of the older life; Alf of the new.

Their very speech betrayed them: for the elder boy's tongue was touched with the slow, cawing music of the shepherds and labourers with whom he loved to consort, while Alf's was the speech of a city rat, sharp, incisive, twanging.

In the holiday Ern worked on the hill in the harvest, and was known to all the men and most of the animals at the Moot Farm, just across the Lewes Road. Once, in the early spring, he passed the night out in Shadow Coombe, and came home fearfully just before school.

His mother was shaking the mat at the front-door.

"Where you been then?" she asked ferociously.

"With the shepherd in his hut," answered Ernie. "Dis lambin time. His boy's run'd away."

The lad's manifest truthfulness disarmed the angry woman.

Alf peeped round his mother's skirts.

"Did he give you anythink?" he asked.

"I didn't ask him for nohun," Ern answered, aggrieved.

Alf sneered.

"Fat 'ead!" he cried. "Aynt arf soft, Ern aynt!"

Their father, dressing at the upper window, heard the conversation and agonized. Tolerant as was Edward Caspar of grammatical solecisms, his ear, sensitive as Lady Blanche's, writhed at the mangling of vowels by his second son. His wife, who came from the Bucks border of the great city on the Thames, had indeed the Cockney phrase but not the offending accent.

When he came downstairs, in a moment of despair, he poured his troubles into Anne's unsympathetic ear.

"What a way to talk!" he groaned.

"I don't see it matters," his wife answered grimly. "*They* aren't going to Harrow and Trinity."

The big man winced. It was a real grief to him that his sons were not to have in life the advantages that he believed himself to have been given.

"You needn't throw that up at me," he grumbled into his brown beard.

She put her hand on his shoulder.

Her husband was the only creature in the world to whom Anne Caspar sometimes demonstrated affection.

"And a good job, too, I says," she observed. "They got to work." Words that gave unconscious witness to the estimate she and her class held of their rulers and their education.

CHAPTER XI

THE STUDY

INSTEAD then of going to the Preparatory-school, the Public-school, and the University in which their father had sought to learn the art of useful citizenship, the two lads attended on week-days the Board-school in the hollow between the church and Rodmill.

New amid much that was old, it reared its gaunt red head above a crowd of workmen's cottages which stood on ground still called the Moot, where of old, under the Kneb, beside the bourne, the Saxon folk from hill and wold and marshy level gathered about the Moot-tree to discuss affairs, deal justly between man and man and proclaim the common will.

Mr. Pigott, a short, shrewd, bearded man, with a merry grey eye, swift to wrath, was the headmaster as he was manager of the chapel. Thoroughly efficient in a day when the Gospel of Efficiency had been little preached, he managed chapel and school admirably.

The boys attended both.

Alf was always at the head of his class, Ern never anywhere in particular.

As Mr. Pigott told the boys' mother, Ern had plenty of brains, but he didn't care to use them.

"He's a little gentleman though — like his father," ended the schoolmaster.

Mr. Pigott was on the whole less of a snob than most of us. As an honest radical he scorned rank, perhaps a little ostentatiously; while money was very little to him. But for the mysterious quality of breeding he had the respect the roughest of us confess in the presence of something finer than ourselves. And on the rare occasions in which Mr. Edward Caspar had been induced to deliver an address at the new Institute he would say to his teaching staff in awed voice —

"There's English for you! Don't you wish you could talk like that . . .?"

Now his comparison of her son to her husband provoked Mrs. Caspar as it never failed to do.

"That's all very well if you can afford it," she commented acridly. "But Ern's got to make his own way in the world."

"He'll do," said Mr. Pigott. "He won't be forgotten, you'll see. He's a good lad, and that's something even in these days."

And if Ernie was not a success in the schoolroom, in the playground he excelled. Like his father in being universally popular, he was unlike him in his marked athletic capacity.

True, he was always in trouble for slacking with the masters, who none the less were fond of him; while Alf, the most assiduous of youths, was disliked by everybody and gloried in it. He won all the gilt-edged prizes, while Ern took the canings.

Alf reported his brother's misdoings gleefully at home.

"Ern got it again," he crowed jubilantly one evening. "They fairly sliced him, didn't they, Ern?"

His recollections of the scene were so spicy that — for once — he was dreadfully affectionate to the brother who had given him such prurient pleasure.

"Ern in trouble of course!" cried the mother angrily. "You needn't tell me! A nice credit to his home and all! I'm ashamed to look Mr. Pigott in the face come Sunday!"

"Now then, mother!" grumbled Mr. Caspar. "Let the boy alone!"

"Yes, you're always for him!" flared Mrs. Caspar, buttering the bread. "Setting him against his mother! But for you he'd be all right."

Alf sat like a little wizened devil at the end of the table in his high chair, his eyes twinkling malignantly over his bib, enjoying the fun.

"It's him and Ern against you and me, mum, ayn't it?" he cried, shuffling on his seat.

Whether it was his son's accent or a sense of the tragic truth underlying his child's words, that affected him, Mr. Caspar rose and shuffled out of the kitchen into the study, which was looked on in the family as dad's sanctuary.

The scene had taken place in the kitchen at tea, which was the one meal the family shared. Breakfast, dinner, supper, Edward Caspar had by himself in the little back room looking out on the fig-tree; and Mrs. Caspar waited on him.

That was by her desire, not his: for from the start of their married life Anne had determined that, so far as in her lay, her husband should have everything just as he was accustomed to. Thus from earliest infancy the children had been taught by their mother to understand that the two sitting-rooms were sacred to dad, and never to be entered except by permission. Their place was the kitchen. She herself set the example by always knocking on the door of either room before entering.

And the atmosphere of these two rooms was radically different from that of the rest of the house. Anne knew it and rejoiced. Everywhere else the tobacconist's daughter reigned obviously supreme. These rooms were the *habitat* of a scholar and a gentleman. The little back-room, indeed, was remarkable for little but the solidity of its few articles of furniture, and the old silver salver with the crest, reposing on the mahogany side-board. But the front sitting-room, with the bow-window looking out on to Beech-hangar and the long spur of the Downs that hid Beau-nez from view, was known in the family as the study, and looked what it was called.

The room, flooded with sunshine, was Mrs. Caspar's secret pride. She knew very well that there was nothing quite like it in Beachbourne, Old or New, and preserved it jealously. She did not understand it, much preferring her own kitchen, but she recognized that it stamped her husband for what he was, admired its atmosphere of distinction, and loved showing it to her rare visitors. On these occasions she stood herself in the passage, one arm of steel barring the door, like a priest showing the sanctuary to one without the pale. And it gave her malicious pleasure when Canon Willcocks, from the Rectory, opposite, calling one day, showed surprise, not untinged with jealousy, at what he was permitted to see. The Canon clearly thought it unseemly that Lazarus living at the Rectory gate should boast a room like that. And he was seriously annoyed when Anne, pointing to the Cavalier

upon the wall, referred to the first Lord Ravensrood as "my children's ancestor."

On the evening of the squabble in the kitchen, Ernie joined his father in the study after tea.

As Alf was fond of remarking, "Ern's welcome there if no one else ayn't."

Edward Caspar was sitting by the fire as usual, brooding over the meerschaum he was colouring. His manuscript lay where it usually lay on the chair at his side, and a critical eye would have noted that it was little thicker than when Mr. Trupp had first seen it some years before.

"Ain't you well then, dad?" asked the boy in his beautiful little treble.

"I'm all right, Boy-lad," the other answered. "Mother didn't touch you, did she?"

There was something reassuring always about Ernie's manner with his father, as of a woman dealing with a sick child.

"No," he replied. "She said I was to come to you."

"Why were you caned at school?" asked the father, after a pause.

The boy's eyes were down, and he scraped the floor with one foot.

"Fighting," he said at last reluctantly. "Where it were, Alf sauce Aaron Huggett in de playground, and Aaron twist Alf's arm. Allowed he'd had more'n enough of Alf's lip. And he wouldn't leggo. So I paint his nose for him. And it bled."

Edward Caspar puffed.

"Why don't you let Alfred fight his own battles?"

Steadfast to the tradition of his own class in this matter if in no other, he revolted against the common abbreviation of his younger son's name.

"Alf fight!" cried Ernie with rare scorn. "He couldn't fight no-hows. D'isn't in him. He'd just break."

"Then why does he sauce em?"

Ernie resumed his foot scraping.

"That's what I says tó him," he admitted in his slow ca-a-ing speech. "Only where it seems he ca'an't keep his

tongue tidy. Seems he ca'an't elp issalf like. Then he gets into trouble. Then I avs to fight for him."

"And if you don't fight for him no one else will?" said his father.

"No," replied Ernie with the delightful reluctance of innocence and youth. "See no one do'osn't like Alf — only issalf." He added as a slow after-thought, "And I be his brother like."

Edward Caspar held out a big hand.

Ern saw his father was pleased, he didn't know why; and he was glad.

In Ern's estimation there was no one in the world like dad — the kind, the comforter.

Once indeed in Sunday-school, some years before, when Mr. Pigott had been expatiating on the character of our Lord, the silence had been broken by the voice of a very little lad,

"My dad's like that."

CHAPTER XII

ALF SHOWS HIS COLOURS

IN fact, as Ernie said, the two were brothers, and in some sort complementary.

Ern had to the full the chivalrous qualities of the Beauregards. He never forgot that he was Alf's elder brother, or that Alf was a poor little creature with a chest in which Mr. Trupp took an abnormal interest. He fought many battles, bore many blows for his young brother. Alf took it all as a matter of course, regarding himself as a little god whom Ernie was privileged to serve and suffer for. Ern accepted the other's constant suggestion of superiority without revolt, and took the second place with the lazy good-nature characteristic of him.

Ern indeed was nothing of a leader. In all the adventurous vicissitudes of boy-life the initiative lay with Alf, who planned the mischief; while Ern, obedient to his brother, for whose brains he had the profoundest admiration, carried it out and paid the penalty, as a rule uncomplainingly, at home and abroad.

Old Town was now creeping west along the foot of the Downs towards Lewes. On its outskirts and in the cornfields where are to-day rows of red-brick villas, were still to be found flint cottages, long blue-roofed barns, and timbered farmsteads among elms. As little by little the town, with its border of allotment gardens, flooded along the New Road, sweeping up Rodmill and brimming over towards Ratton and the Decoy on the edge of the marshes, these buildings that dated from another age were gradually diverted from their pristine use to be the habitations of those who no longer drew their living from the earth.

Thus in the house which had once been the huntsman's lodge, beside the now abandoned kennels, lived Mr. Pigott — one foot in the country, as he said, one in the town.

Every morning he walked across the foot-path, past Moot Farm, to school. Mr. Pigott's house stood in a hollow coombe a long way back from the road. The gorse-clad sides of the Down rose steeply at the back of it. In front was an orchard in which a walnut-tree lorded it, conspicuous over the lesser trees.

It was towards the end of their school time, when Ern was nearly fourteen, that Alf planned a raid upon this tree, famous in the locality for its beauty and fruitfulness.

The adventure needed careful thinking out.

The approach to the house was along an unscreened path that led across the arable land. Between the path and the house was the orchard in which stood the tree with its coveted treasure.

The trouble was that Mrs. Pigott's window overlooked the orchard, and she was always in that window — so much Alf, in his many reconnaissances of the position, discovered.

Now it was well known in the school that Mrs. Pigott had but one eye, and that of glass, which accounted perhaps for its extraordinary powers of vision. And besides Mrs. Pigott with her one sharp eye, there was Mrs. Pigott's little dog with his many sharp teeth. There was also in the background Mr. Pigott, who, outside the chapel, was athletic and regrettably fierce.

Alf waited long for his opportunity, in terror lest the tree should be beaten before he had worked his will upon it, but his chance came at last.

One Saturday afternoon he and Ern were loitering in Church Street, marching along with the starts and stops, the semi-innocent and semi-surreptitious manner of boys waiting for Satan to enter into them and prompt them to definite action, when Alf dug his brother with a warning elbow.

Mrs. Pigott was staring with her glass eye into the ironmonger's opposite the church. On her arm was a basket and at her feet her dog. It was clear that she was doing her week-end shopping.

Alf, swift to seize his opportunity, set off up the hill, hot-foot, silent, with a bustle of arms and legs, his brow puckered as he concentrated ruthlessly upon his purpose.

Ern followed the fierce, insistent, little figure more leisurely.

"Steady on!" he called. "Where away then?"

"Walnut-tree," panted Alf. "Now's yer chance."

Ern, who knew from experience that the dirty and dangerous work would fall to his lot, lagged.

"Mr. Pigott's there," he grumbled.

"Now he ayn't then," cried Alf, spurring the laggard on. "He's gone over to Lewes for the Conference. Didn't you hear mother at breakfast?"

There had been in truth a split in the chapel. The Established Methodists were breaking away from the Foundation Methodists, and the Primitive Methodists were thinking of following suit. The little community was therefore a tumult of warring tongues.

Alf led up the hill, past the chalk-pit, along the side of the Downs, and dropped down on his objective from the rear. Coming to the fence that ran round the orchard, he peeped at the low house lying in the background under the green flank of the hill.

Ern followed reluctantly, as one drawn to his doom by a fate he cannot withstand.

He wanted the walnuts; he wanted to be brave; but he liked Mr. Pigott, and, usually obedient to his brother's suggestions, had qualms in this case.

"Go on then!" urged Alf. It was a favourite phrase of his. "There ayn't no one there."

"Come on yourself," answered Ern without enthusiasm.

"Now, I'll stay and watch the path for you against *her*," piped Alf.

But for once Ern was firm.

"I aren't a-gooin unless you cooms too," he said doggedly.

"What's the good of me, then?" scoffed Alf in his fierce and feverish way. "Can I climb the tree? Only wish I could. I'd show you. I suppose you'll be throwin *that* up at me next! My belief you're afraid."

But Ernie was not to be moved from the position which he had taken up. Just now and then Alf had remarked that his brother for all his softness became hard — adamant indeed — in a way that rather frightened Alf.

"I'll goo up the tree and shake em down to you," Ern said in his slow, musical voice. "You stand at the foot of her and gather em."

"Fine!" jeered Alf. "And when Mr. Pigott comes out you'll be up the tree safe as dysies, and I'll be on the floor for him to paste!"

"I thart you said he'd gone to Lewes," retorted Ern, unusually alert.

"So he has," replied Alf sourly. "Only I suppose he won't stay there for ever, will he?"

Ern, however, was proof against all the other's logic; and finally the two boys climbed the fence together.

The walnut was a majestic tree, with boughs that dropped almost to the ground, making a splendid pavilion of green.

Ern swarmed the tree. Alf stood at the foot, sheltered by the drooping branches. Thus he could watch the house, while nobody in the house could see anything of him but a pair of meagre black legs.

He was fairly safe and knew it, but even so his heart pattered, he bit his nails continually, and kept a furtive eye on the line of his retreat.

"Hurry!" he kept on calling.

Ern, up aloft, went to work like a man. He tossed the branches to and fro. The ripe walnuts came rattling down. Alf, underneath, gathered rich harvest. He filled his pockets, his cap, his handkerchief. Opening his shirt, he stuffed the brown treasure into his bosom and grew into a portly urchin who rattled when he moved.

"I got nigh a bushel!" he cried keenly. "Throw your coat down, and I'll fill the pockets!"

The little devil darted to and fro, tumbling spiderlike upon the falling riches, absorbed in accumulation. His heart and eyes burned. There was money in this — money. And money was already taking its appointed place in Alf's philosophy.

He would sell the nuts at so much a pound — some wholesale to a fruiterer he knew in the remote East End; some retail to his schoolfellows.

The quality and quantity of the loot so absorbed him that he forgot his fears. And when he glanced up through the

screen of thick branches to see a pair of grey-stockinged legs, thick and formidable to a degree, advancing upon the tree with dreadful deliberation, his heart stopped.

The enemy was on them.

Alf emptied handkerchief, pockets, cap: he emptied himself by a swift ducking motion that sent the treasure heaped against his heart pouring forth with a rattle about his neck and head and ears.

Then he cast fearful eyes to the rear. It was thirty yards to the fence and beyond there was but the unscreened path without a scrap of cover, leading across the plough, past the Moot Farm and abandoned kennels to the New Road.

Alf saw at a glance that escape was impossible. Mr. Pigott, for all his forty years, could sprint.

Swift as a cornered rat, Alf made his decision.

He marched out from his shelter towards the approaching legs, a puny little creature with pale peaked face, and Ern's coat flung over his arm.

Mr. Pigott was advancing, very grim and grey, across the rough grass, his hands behind him, dragging something. He seemed in no hurry, and not in the least surprised to see Alf, whom he ignored.

"Please, sir," said Alf, perking his face up with an air of frankness, "there's a boy up your tree. Here's his coat."

Mr. Pigott walked slowly on, drawing behind him a sixty-foot hose, which issued like a white snake from the scullery window.

"I know," he said with suppressed quiet. "And I know who set him on to it. I can't beat you because you'd break if I touched you. But I'll take your brother's skin off him though he's twice the man you are, you dirty little cur!"

He brought the hose to bear on the brigand in the tree, and loosed the water-spout and the vials of his wrath together.

"Ah, you young scoundrel!" he roared, finding joy in explosive self-expression. "I'll teach you come monkeying after my nuts!"

Swish went the stream of water through the branches.

Ern hid as best he could on the leeward side of the trunk.

Mr. Pigott brought his artillery mercilessly to bear upon

the boy's clasping hands. Ern, spluttering and sprawling, came down the tree with a rush and made a bolt for the fence.

Mr. Pigott, roaring jovially, played the stream full on him. It was a powerful gush, and floored the boy. The avenger knew no mercy and drenched his victim as he lay.

It was a sodden little figure who crept home disconsolately ten minutes later.

Alf had been back some time and had already told his tale, gibbering with excitement and fear.

Ern's mother, in a white fury, was awaiting the boy in the kitchen.

"I'll learn you disgrace me!" she cried. "Robbing your own chapel-manager's orchard — and then come home like a drownded rat!"

She set about the lad in good earnest.

Alf, perched upon the dresser to be out of the way, watched the fun, biting his nails.

"You mustn't hit her back then!" he screamed. "Your own mother!"

"I aren't hittin' her back then!" cried Ern, dogged, dazed, and warding off the blows as best he might. "I'm only defendin of mesalf."

The noise of the scuffle was considerable.

Outside in the passage was the sound of slippered feet. Then some one tried the door.

"It's only dad!" cried the devil on the dresser, white and with little black eyes that danced.

"What's up?" called an agitated voice from outside. "Hold on, mother! Give the boy a chance."

Some one rattled the door.

"Go about your business!" cried Mrs. Caspar. "There's a pair of you!"

Her anger exhausted and shame possessing her, she was going out into the yard to shelter herself in the little shed against the Workhouse wall, when Alf's sudden scream stayed her.

"Mum! — down't leave me! — he'll kill me!"

She turned to mark a white flare burning in the face of her elder son.

She had seen it before and had been afraid.

When Ern looked like that he ceased to be Ern: he became transfigured — yes, and terrible: like, she sometimes thought, the cavalier in the picture must have been in anger.

"Take them sopping duds off," she said quietly, "and then go up and put your Sundays on."

Half an hour later Ern, wearing dry clothes, entered the study.

He was sweet, smiling, and a thought abashed.

His father, on the other hand, evinced signs of terrible emotion.

His face was mottled, and he was shaking.

Wrapped in his dressing-gown, he stood before the fire, trying pitifully to preserve his dignity, and moving uneasily from leg to leg like a chained elephant.

"Did she hurt you?" he asked, seeking to steady his voice.

Ern shook his head.

"She laid about me middlin tidy," he admitted. "But she didn't not to say hurt me. She don't know how — a woman don't. Too much flusteration along of it."

Edward Caspar collapsed into a chair.

"What happened?" he asked.

Ern recounted the story truthfully, the white glimmer in his face coming and going between pants as he told.

"Why d'you let him lead you astray?" asked the father irritably, at the end.

Ern wagged his head slowly and began to scrape once more with his foot.

"Alf's artfuller nor me!" he said at last in a shamefaced way.

CHAPTER XIII

ALF MAKES A REMARK

BOTH boys turned up at Sunday-school next morning: Alf defiant, Ern abashed.

Mr. Pigott ignored the former, snubbed him brutally when occasion offered, and showed himself benignant to the prime sinner.

After chapel Mrs. Caspar spoke to him.

"I don't know what you think of my son, Mr. Pigott," she began.

"Which son?" asked the other in his bluff way.

"Why, Ernie to be sure. He's always bringing shame upon me."

"He's worth twice the other," cried Mr. Pigott, letting off steam.

"Ah, yes, you've got your favourites, Mr. Pigott!" retorted the woman.

"And I'm not the only one!" answered the outraged schoolmaster. "Ern's a boy. And boys will be boys, as we all know. But he's a little gentleman, Ern is. He's his father over again."

The comparison of Ernie to his father, however well intentioned, always touched Mrs. Caspar on the raw. Her eyes sparkled. Every now and then she reminded you forcibly that her grandmother had lived in a by-street — off Greyhound Road, Fulham.

"Ah," she muttered vengefully, "I'll cut his little liver out yet, you'll see."

Mr. Pigott rounded on her, genuinely shocked.

"And you a religious woman!" he cried. "Shame on you!"

"I don't care," answered Mrs. Caspar. "I see it coming. I always have. And it's just more than I can bear."

Mr. Pigott did not understand the cause of the woman's

emotion, but he recognized that it was genuine and so respected it.

"Well, he's leaving school now," he said more gently. "He'll settle down once he's got his nose to the grindstone."

Later, at the meeting of the Bowling Green Committee, in the Moot, the schoolmaster reported Mrs. Caspar's saying to Mr. Trupp.

"She's a hard un," he commented.

"She's need to be," growled the other.

"What's that, Doctor?" asked Mr. Pigott.

"If she let go of him, he'd be dead in a month," mumbled Mr. Trupp.

"Mr. Caspar would?"

The Doctor looked at the grey church-tower bluff against the sky.

"But she won't let go," he added. "She's got her qualities."

"She has," said Mr. Pigott, treading the green. "She's a diamond — as hard, as keen."

The two always sparred when they met and loved their friendly bouts. Both were radicals; but they had arrived at their convictions by very different routes. The schoolmaster had inherited his opinions from tough, dissenting ancestors, the man of science had acquired them from Huxley and Darwin. Politics the pair rarely discussed, except at election time; for on that subject they were in rough agreement. But the two men wrangled genially over religion, the ethics of sport, even the two Caspar boys; for Mr. Trupp was the one man in Old Town who alleged a preference for the younger boy — mainly, his wife declared, because he must be "contrary."

Mr. Pigott now told the stubborn man almost with glee the story of Alf's treachery.

"What d'ye think of that now?" he asked defiantly.

"Why," grunted the Doctor, "what I should expect."

"Of course," said the sarcastic Mr. Pigott.

"He's got the faults of his physique," continued the other. "He's afraid of a thrashing because he knows it'd kill him. Self-preservation is always the first law of life."

"He's a little cur," said Mr. Pigott. "That's what your young Alf is."

"I've no doubt he is," replied the Doctor. "You would be too if you'd got that body to live in."

"I'd be ashamed," shouted the other. "I'd commit suicide offhand."

"The wonder is he's alive at all," continued Mr. Trupp, quite unmoved. "Must have some grit in him somewhere or he'd have died when he was born."

"That's you and his mother," said the schoolmaster censoriously. "Saving useless human material that ought to be scrapped. And you call yourself a Man of Science! In a properly ordered community you'd stand your trial at Lewes Assizes, the two of you — for adding to the criminal classes. Now if we were back in the good old days, they'd have exposed Alf at birth — and quite right, too."

"Quite so," said Mr. Trupp. "Your Christianity has a lot to answer for, as I've remarked before."

It fell to Mr. Pigott to find a job of work for Ernie when his favourite left school: for at that date there were no Labour Bureaux, no Juvenile Advisory Committees, no attempt to make the most of the country's one solid asset — its Youth. And the rich had not yet made their grand discovery of the last twenty-five years — that the poor have bodies; and that these bodies must be saved, even if it cost a little more than saving their souls, which can always be done upon the cheap.

Mr. Pigott had little difficulty in his self-imposed task, for he did not mean to remain a schoolmaster all his life, and was already dabbling in the commercial life of the growing town.

Ernie started as an office-boy in a coal-merchant's office in Cornfield Road by the Central Station, which formed the junction between the Old Town and the New.

Before the boy embarked on his career, Mr. Pigott invited him to tea and lecture.

"It's your own fault if you don't get on," said the schoolmaster aggressively after the muffins. "Rests with yourself.

Office boy to President — like they do in America. Make a romance of it."

"I shall try, sir," cried Ern, with the easy enthusiasm characteristic of him.

"I'll lay you won't, then!" retorted the other rudely. "I'll lay all the work I've put into you these ten years past goes down the drain. Now your grandfather . . ."

He stopped short, remembering Mrs. Caspar had told him that their origin had been kept from the two boys. . . .

At his new job Ern did not work very hard. It was not in him to do that; for he had his father's complete lack of ambition. But he worked just enough to keep his place, to pay his mother for his keep by the time he was seventeen, and have some "spending money," as he called it, over, with which to buy cigarettes, and join the cricket club. In time he even attained to the dignity of an office stool: for his handwriting was excellent, his ability undoubted, and his education as good as most.

"Ern don't lick the stamps no more. He writes the letters," was Alf's report at home.

The younger brother too had now launched out upon the world. But Alf was very different from Ern. He had his own ideas from the start and went his own way. Somehow he had ferreted out the facts about his grandfather's career; and that career it was his deliberate determination to surpass.

Those were the early days of the motor industry and the petrol engine. Alf made his mother apprentice him to Hewson and Clarke, an enterprising young engineering firm in the East End, off Pevensey Road.

"No Old Town for me," he said knowingly. "New Town's the bird!"

And the boy worked with the undeviating energy of an insect. All day he was busy at the shop, and in the evening came home, grimy and tired, to have a wash and then settle down in the kitchen to study the theory of the petrol-engine.

His mother, ambitious as her son, watched him with admiration, guarding his hours of study jealously from interruption.

" He's his grand-dad over again," she confided to her husband in one of their rare moments of intimacy.

Edward Caspar shook his head. He was interested in his second son, although in his heart of hearts he disliked the boy. He disliked ambitious men — their restlessness, their unhappy egoism, their incapacity to give themselves to any cause from which they would not reap personal advantage, offended his spiritual sense; and he followed with amused benevolence the careers of his contemporaries at Harrow and Trinity who were reaping now the fruits of Orthodoxy, and just becoming Cabinet Ministers, Bishops, Judges, and the like.

" Alf hasn't got my father's physique," he said.

" You wait," Anne replied. " He'll conquer that too. Last time Mr. Trupp saw him he said he'd do now — if he took care."

Ern watched his brother's feverish activities with ironical smiles.

" He's like a little engine himself," he said. " No time to look around and take a little pleasure in life. All the while a-running along the lines — puff-puff-puff! — with his nose to the ground. Not knowin where he's goin or why; only set on getting somewhere, he don't know where, some day, he don't know when."

Himself he preferred the leisurely life, and was known among his friends as Gentleman Ernie. The office, which prided itself upon its tone, for in it worked a youth who said he had been at a public school, had taken the country accent off his tongue. Ern was indeed a bit of a dandy now, who oiled his hair, and took an interest in his ties; while Alf never spent a penny on his clothes, was always shabby, and seldom clean. The dapper young clerk and the grimy little mechanic, on the rare occasions when they appeared in the streets together, formed a marked contrast, of which Ernie at least was aware.

" You'd never know em for brothers," the passers-by would remark.

Both had arrived at the age when the young male joins a gang, curious about women, but inclining to be suspicious of them. Alf, however, strong in himself, continued on his

prickly and independent way. He was not drawn to others, nor were others drawn to him. Companionable Ern, on the other hand, who was everybody's friend, was absorbed into a gang; but he was different from his gang-mates. He used less hair-oil than they did, and wore more modest ties. Moreover, there was nothing of the hooligan about him.

"Such a gentlemanly lad," said Mrs. Trupp. "That's his father coming out in him."

"May the resemblance end there," muttered Mr. Trupp.

The lady speared her husband on the point of her needle.

"Croakie!" she remarked.

Ern could have been a leader among his mates, had he chosen to assume authority. His quiet, his distinction, his happy manner, and above all the fact that he was a promising cricketer and had made half a century on the Frying Pan at Lewes for the Sussex Colts against the Canterbury Wanderers, marked him out. But Ern would not lead. He spent his evenings in the main at home rather than in the lighted streets, and was at his happiest sitting in the study opposite his father. On these occasions the two rarely spoke, but they enjoyed a silent communion that was eminently satisfying to them both. Just sometimes the father would touch the revolving book-case on his right; take out one of the little blue poetry books Ern knew so well, and read *The Scholar Gypsy* or *The Happy Warrior*.

Ern loved that, but he was far too indolent to pursue the readings himself. When his father had finished, he would return the book to its place and say,

"You should read a bit yourself, Boy-lad," and Ern's invariable reply would be,

"I will, dad, when I got the time."

But Ern was one of those who never had the time and never would have.

Then the two would relapse into smoke and silence and vague dreams, out of which Edward Caspar's voice would emerge,

"Where's Alfred?"

To which Ern would answer with a faint smirk,

"Studyin in the kitchen."

Ern's tendency to be a masher, as the phrase of the day went, delighted Mr. Pigott. He looked on it as the best sign he had yet detected in the boy.

"Who's the lady, Ern?" he chaffed, meeting the lad.

The boy smiled shyly. At such moments, in spite of his plainness, he looked beautiful.

"Haven't got one, sir," he said.

It was true, too. His attitude towards girls was unlike that of his mates. He neither chirped at them in the streets, nor avoided them aggressively, nor was self-conscious in their presence. He was always friendly with them, even affectionate; but he went no farther. Some of the Old Town maidens wished he would. But, in fact, this was not Ern's weakness.

The Destroyer, who lies in wait to undo us all, if we give him but a crevice through which to creep into our citadel, was taking the line of least resistance, as he does in every case.

There began to be rumours in Old Town. His father's weakness, known to all, lent these rumours wing. In Churchy Beachbourne, as the enemy called the town by reason of the number and variety of its consecrated buildings, people were swift to believe, eager to hand on their beliefs.

Prebendary Willcocks — which was his proper title — or Canon Willcocks — as he had taught the locality to call him — who had reasons of his own for disliking Edward Caspar, heard and shook his aristocratic head, repeating the rumour to all and sundry in a lowered voice. The Lady Augusta Willcocks, that indefatigable worker in the parish for God and the Tory Party, entirely lacking in her husband's delicate feeling, echoed it resonantly.

Mr. Pigott was honestly aghast.

"Never!" he cried, and added —"God help him if his mother hears!"

He was so genuinely concerned indeed that he went round to 60 Rectory Walk to find out by indirect examination if Mrs. Caspar had heard.

She had; and was distraught.

"If he takes to that, I'll turn him out of the house!" she cried savagely. "Straight I will!"

And there was no question that she meant what she said.

"The best way to make trouble is to meet it half-way," muttered the schoolmaster, cowed for once by the woman's terrible emotion. "Give the boy a chance — even if he is your own son."

"Alf says he was blind at the match," the other answered doggedly.

"Alf!" scoffed Mr. Pigott, savage in his turn. "I wouldn't care *that* what Alf says about his brother. I know your Alf."

"And I don't then," said Mrs. Caspar. "I try to keep it fair between em — for all what folks may say different."

That evening Mr. Pigott met Alf in Church Street.

The schoolmaster stopped, holding with his eye the youth in the stained blue overall. Alf approached him delicately, with averted face and a sly smile.

It was clear that he courted the encounter.

Mr. Pigott came to the point at once.

"How's Ern?" he boomed in a voice of challenge.

Alf dropped his eyes.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said, "our Ern's goin the same way as dad."

Mr. Pigott gazed at him as one stupefied.

Then in a flash he understood . . . Mr. Trupp was right. The boy was abnormal: his spirit dwarfed and stunted by the miserable tenement in which it was forced to dwell.

This sudden peep into one of the sewers of Nature, this illumination of what before had been to him obscure, this swift suggestion of Evil lurking obscenely in the dusk to leap on the unwary, brought him up abruptly. His anger passed for the moment. Something between fear and pity laid hold of him.

"I suppose you're glad," he said quietly.

Alf smiled that satyr-like smile of his, sickly and uncertain.

"Ah, you never did like me, Mr. Pigott!" he sneered.

"I don't," answered Mr. Pigott. "I never did. But I'm beginning to understand you. You're possessed."

He went on down the street and called at the Manor-house.

Mrs. Trupp was, he knew, a staunch friend of Ernie's.

The lady was playing with her children in the garden. But she gave both her ears to her visitor when she knew his errand. Had she heard anything?

Mrs. Trupp coloured. She *had* heard something which greatly perturbed her pure and beautiful spirit.

Her Joe, home from Rugby, had reported that on the way back from a match at Lewes Ernie Caspar had taken a drop which had made him funny.

"It was only a little," the lady ended. "Joe said it wasn't enough to make an ordinary canary queer. But it upset Ernest for the moment."

Mr. Pigott marched on down the hill to the railway station.

It was shutting-up time, and the object of his concern was just leaving the office.

Mr. Pigott unceremoniously seized the boy by the hand.

"For God's sake take a pull, Ern!" he said, most seriously.

Ernie looked up surprised, read the distress in the other's bearded face, and burned one of those sudden white flares of his.

"I see!" he said. "Alf's been at it again!" and he broke away.

Swiftly he went home, passed the study door, and entered the kitchen.

His mother was out.

Alf, his elbows on the table, and his chin on his hands, was studying a model-engine under the gas-light.

He looked up surlily as Ern entered.

"Keep out of it!" he ordered. "You've heard what mother says. The kitchen's mine at this time. I don't want you."

"But I want you, my lad," answered Ernie, brutal in his bitterness.

He locked the door, and took off his coat.

"Been tellin the tale again!" he trembled, as he rolled up his sleeves. "I've had more'n enough of it. Put em up! You're for it this journey!"

Alf had risen. He knew that look upon his brother's face, and was afraid.

"You mustn't touch me!" he screamed, shaking a crooked finger at the other. "I'm delicit, I am."

It was the ancient ruse which had stood him in good stead many a time at home and in the playground.

"Else you'll tell mother!" sneered Ern. "Very well. Have it your own way!"

He seized the model engine on the table, and smashed it down on to the floor. It lay at his feet, a broken mass, with spinning wheels.

Then Ern unlocked the door and went out.

At supper that evening he was still burning his white flare.

Alf saw it and was cowed; Mrs. Caspar saw it too and held her peace. Edward Caspar was, as always, away in the clouds and aware of nothing unusual when he looked in to say good-night.

CHAPTER XIV

EVIL

ALF took no overt steps to avenge himself. Like old Polonius he went round to work, lying in wait for the chance he knew would come. He had not to wait long.

On the August Bank Holiday there was a big dance at the Rink in Cornfield Road. Ern attended. He danced well and was sought after as a partner.

Alf went too.

Ern was surprised to see his brother there, and pleased: for it was not in his nature to bear malice long.

"Hullo, Alf!" he chaffed. "Didn't know you was a dancing-man. Let me find you a partner then."

Alf shook his head, smiling that shifty smile of his.

"I ain't," he said. "I only come to watch."

That was true; but the words carried no sinister meaning to Ern's innocent ear.

Alf watched.

He sat by himself on one of the faded plush-seats that went round the hall. Nobody spoke to him, nobody heeded him. The seats on either side of him were left vacant.

Sour, shabby, ill at ease, yet sure of himself, he watched with furtive eyes the flow of boys and girls swirling by him in the dance.

One of Ern's friends pointed his brother out to him.

"I know," laughed Ern. "Let him alone. He don't want us. He's above larking, Alf is."

"Never seen him at a hop before," remarked the friend. "And now he don't look happy."

The evening was hot, the dancers thirsty, the drinks good. Alf observed his brother go to the bar once, twice, and again. Then he rose to go home, nodding to himself.

Ern passed him in the dance and stopped.

"What, Alf! You're off early!"

"I got a bit of reading to do," answered Alf.

"So long, then," said Ernie. "Shan't be long first myself." And he joined the current again, with flushed face and loquacious tongue.

It was just ten when Alf entered the kitchen.

His father had already retired to bed; his mother was sitting up.

"You're late," she remarked sharply. "Where's Ern?"

"Heard em say he was at the Rink," Alf answered sheepishly.

Mrs. Caspar's face darkened. The Puritan in her rose in arms.

"Dancing?" she asked.

Alf feigned uneasiness.

"I'll stay and let him in," he said. "He mayn't be back yet a bit."

Mrs. Caspar took her candle.

Regular as a machine, she rose always at six, and expected to be in bed by ten.

Anything that disturbed her routine she resented, surly as an animal.

"Let me know when he comes in," she said. "I'll speak to him. Keepin us up to all hours and disturbin dad's rest while he carries on. Might be a disorderly house."

She left the room.

Alf turned out the gas, and sat in the darkness, watching the dying fire, and waiting for his mouse.

A crisis in his life had come.

He was about to take the first big step along the road that was going to lead him to success or ruin.

He was aware of it, and calm as a practised gambler.

Once he rose and locked the front door to make sure his brother could not enter without his knowledge.

It was eleven o'clock when he heard feet outside.

Those feet told their own tale.

Alf turned up the light in the passage and opened the door.

His brother lolled against the side-wall like a mortally wounded man.

"Take my arm, old chap," said Alf, and supported his brother into the kitchen.

Ern sat down suddenly at the table. Alf lit the gas.

The light fell on his brother's foolish face and clearly irritated him. He put up his hand to brush it away.

"Arf a mo'," said Alf soothingly, skipped light-footed upstairs, and knocked at his mother's door.

She was half-undressed, brushing her hair, her neck and shoulders bare in the moonlight.

Alf glanced at them and even in that moment of excitement thought how beautiful they were.

Mrs. Caspar raised a finger.

Her husband was in bed and apparently asleep, Lady Blanche upon the mantelpiece staring vacantly at the form of her recumbent son.

"Ern!" whispered Alf, and jerked his head significantly. "You'd best come."

Anne Caspar slipped on a wrap. Candle in hand she descended the stairs and entered the kitchen.

Alf followed stealthily. Like a gnome he stood in the shadow at the foot of the stairs, biting his nails uneasily, as he watched with lewd, malignant eyes.

Ern sat at the table with the dreadful blind face of the living dead.

He saw his mother enter and paid no heed to her. He was too much occupied. A troubled look crossed his face, and clouded it. Then he was very sick.

That amused Alf.

His mother shut the kitchen-door.

But Alf was not to be defrauded of his spectacle.

He opened the door quietly.

His mother, busy on her knees, with a slop pail and cloth, looked up.

"It's only me, mum," muttered Alf.

Her face frightened him: so did her breathing: so did her quiet.

"Come in then," she said. "And shut the door."

Ern still sat at the table.

"You little og!" said Alf fiercely, and shook his brother.

His mother, still on her hands and knees, restrained him.

"Let him be," she said. "It's past that. It's past all."

The door opened slowly.

Mr. Caspar stood in it in the faded quilted dressing-gown that had once graced historic rooms at Trinity.

He stood there, dishevelled from sleep, a tall, round-shouldered ruin of a man, every sign of distress upon his face.

"What is it?" he asked nervously.

"Im!" said Alf.

Mr. Caspar saw Ern, and marked his wife busy on her knees. Then he understood.

The distress on his face deepened.

Anne Caspar rose sharply from her knees, the filthy rag still in her hands.

"Two of you!" she cried thickly. "It's too much!" and shoved him out of the room.

The father's slippered feet shuffled along the passage.

"Take your brother up to bed," ordered Mrs. Caspar.

Alf, too discreet to argue, obeyed.

Anne Caspar locked the door, and sat down at the table.

CHAPTER XV

MR. TRUPP INTRODUCES THE LASH

THERE was no doubt that Anne Caspar was a woman of character.

"Too much character," said Mr. Trupp.

His wife was somewhat shocked.

"Can you have too much character?" she asked.

Her husband was in one of his philosophical moods.

"Character's only will," he growled. "It's the repression or direction of energy. You may misdirect your energies. Most so-called strong men do. Look at this fellow Chamberlain. Willed us into this war. If it hadn't been for his superfluous character we should never have heard of South Africa."

"And your investments would never have gone down," said Mrs. Trupp delicately.

The Doctor may have been unjust to the Colonial Secretary, but he was right about Anne Caspar, whom he knew rather better.

That dour woman had, indeed, just two friends in Beachbourne. One was Mr. Trupp, and the other was Mr. Trupp's wife. Neither had ever failed her; and she knew quite well that neither ever would.

The day after the calamity she went round to see the Doctor.

"He's got to go," she said, tight-lipped and trembling. "That's flat. You know what I been through with his father, Mr. Trupp. You're the only one as does. I'm not going through it again with him. Ned's my man, and I'm going to see him through. But Ern must go his own way. *Stew in his own juice,* as Alf says. They say I've been hard with the boy. So I have. Because I've seen it a-comin ever since he was so high. And I've fought it and been beaten."

The gruff man was wonderfully tender with her. He saw the woman's distress and understood its cause as no other could have done.

"Don't do anything in a hurry," he said soothingly. "Think it over for a week and then come and see me again."

That evening he reported the interview to his wife.

"She'll never turn him out!" cried the kind woman.

"She will though," said Mr. Trupp.

Mrs. Trupp, pink and white with indignation, dropped her eyes to her work to hide the flash in them.

"I'll never forgive her if she does," she said.

"Yes, you will," retorted Mr. Trupp.

Mrs. Trupp answered nothing for a time.

"I shall go round to see her," she said at last with determination.

"You won't move her," the Doctor answered, grimly cheerful.

"No," said Mrs. Trupp. "She hasn't got a heart. As Mr. Pigott says, she's hard as the nether millstone in a frost."

Mr. Trupp put down his coffee-cup and licked his lips like a cat.

"My dear," he said, "you haven't been through her mill."

"Perhaps not," the other answered warmly. "But I *am* a mother."

The sympathetic creature, all love and pity, was as good as her word.

Mrs. Trupp was always full of indignation against Mrs. Caspar when away from her, and in her presence touched by the tragedy of the woman's loneliness.

She found things at Rectory Walk as she had expected or worse.

Ern had lost his job. His escapade at the Rink had reached his employers' ears. None too satisfied with the quality of the lad's work, they had seized the excuse to dismiss him.

"There he is!" cried Mrs. Caspar. "Just turn eighteen and back on my hands. Nobody won't have him, and I don't blame em neether."

"Where is he?" asked Mrs. Trupp.

The interview between the two women was taking place in

the back sitting-room, where Mrs. Caspar always saw her rare visitors.

Anne nodded in the direction of the study.

"Settin along o dad," she said briefly. "Nothing but trouble along of it all. I took his cigarettes away. *If he don't earn neether shan't he smoke,* as Alf says. And now dad won't smoke because Ern can't. *Sympathetic strike,* Alf calls it. And it's dad's one pleasure. I allow him a shilling bacca-money a week. It's just all I do allow him."

"We all make mistakes — especially when we're young," said Mrs. Trupp gently.

The other was adamant.

"There's slips and slips," she retorted. "If he'd gone with a girl I'd have said nothing. But *this*!"

Mrs. Trupp was steadfast in her tranquil way, as her opponent was dogged.

"I know if my Joe made a mistake what I should do," she said.

"What then?" sharply.

"Forgive him," replied the other.

Mrs. Caspar flared up.

"You wouldn't, not if your Joe's father ——"

She pulled up short.

Loyalty to her husband was the soul of Anne Caspar.

On her way home the Doctor's wife met Mr. Pigott.

The sanguine little man stopped short.

"You've heard?" said Mrs. Trupp.

The other nodded, surly as a baited bear.

"Ern was round at my place first thing Sunday to tell me. He kept nothing back." Mr. Pigott dropped his voice like a stage-conspirator. "That young Alf's at the bottom of this, I'll lay."

Mrs. Trupp was shocked.

"Did Ernie say so?"

"No," fiercely. "He wouldn't give his brother away — not he. But I know." He came closer. "I tell you the Devil's in that boy. I can see him leering at me from behind the mask of Alf's face. There is no Alf Caspar. He's only a blind. But there *is* a Devil!"

"O, Mr. Pigott!" murmured the lady.

"Yes, you may O Mr. Pigott me!" cried the wrathful man. "But I've watched. I know. He's the cuckoo kind, Alf is. He wants the place to himself. It's *me and mum* all the time. His father don't count; and Ern's to be jostled out of the nest. Then there'll be room for him to grow. I curse the day Mr. Trupp saved his miserable little life."

"Hush! hush! hush!" said the lady.

"Yes, I know Alf's one of Mr. Trupp's darlings," continued the other. "And I know why. You know my old bicycle they all laugh at. I bought it for ten shillings from a pedlar and patched it up myself. It's the worst bike in Old Town, but I saved it from the scrap-heap, so I think the world of it. Same with Mr. Trupp and young Alf."

Mrs. Trupp reported to her husband that Mr. Pigott had become almost blasphemous over Alf.

"I know," grunted the Doctor. "He's not fair to the boy. Alf's stunted; of course he's stunted. He's grown up all wrong. The wonder is he's grown up at all. He's a standing witness to the power of Nature to make the most of a bad job."

It was next day that Mrs. Caspar came round, as appointed, to see the Doctor, who was much more to her than a physician.

Mr. Trupp had now come to a decision as to the best course to be taken.

"You must send him right away," he said. "That's his best chance."

"Dad won't hear of the Colonies," the other replied. "Says it's so far and he'll never see the boy again once he gets out there. Stood up and fought me fairly!" And it was clear from the way she said it that the resistance encountered from her husband had been as rare as it was astonishing.

"I didn't mean the Colonies," the other replied.

"What then?"

"The Army."

Mrs. Caspar's face fell. She was momentarily shocked: for she belonged to a sect that had for generations been despitefully used by the powers that be. And the weapon of

the powers that be is always in the last resort the Army.

"Discipline is what the boy wants," said Mr. Trupp. "It's what we all want."

Anne Caspar nodded dubiously.

"If it's the right sort," she said.

"It may save him," continued her mentor. "It can't do him any harm. And anyway, it's worth trying. You send Ernie round to me. I'll have a talk with him, and I'll drop in to-morrow and have a chat with his father."

Ernie, when approached, made no difficulty.

He was young; his enthusiasms were easily stirred; and the most famous of South Country regiments, the Forest Rangers, known in history as the Hammer-men, had been more than living up to its reputation in South Africa.

"You'll travel," Mr. Trupp told him. "Go to India as like as not and see a bit of the world. Our Joe's going to Sandhurst next year. Nothing'll do but he must be a Hammer-man — like his grandfather before him. I dare say he'll join you out there."

But if Ern was too young to fight his own battles, there was one doughty warrior who meant to fight them for him.

Mr. Pigott came round to see the Doctor in roaring wrath.

The South African War was in full swing. The frenzy of lusty paganism, called Imperialism, which was sweeping the country, had revolted the schoolmaster and many more. In the estimation of these, the horrors enacted at home in the name of God and Empire surpassed the obscenities of the war itself. Mr. Pigott saw Militarism as a raddled prostitute dancing on the souls and bodies of men.

He burst like a tempest into Mr. Trupp's consulting room.

"The Army!" he cried. "You're going to send that boy into the Army! Take him a first-class ticket to Hell at once! Where's your Militarism led us? The war's costing us half a million a week! Over a thousand casualties at Paardeberg alone! Rowntree stoned in York; Leonard Courtney boycotted in London; Lloyd George escaping for his life over the house-tops for daring to preach Christ! And you call yourself a Radical, Mr. Trupp! — Shame on you!"

Mr. Trupp listened, amused and patient.

"It's discipline he wants," he said at last. "He's soft and slack. He'll never do any good without it. The artist type like his father."

The other began to blaze again.

"Discipline!" he cried. "You talk like a Prussian drill-sergeant. I tell you that lad's got a soul. You *discipline* beasts of the field — with a Big Stick; but you *grow* souls."

Mr. Trupp shook his head.

"We're only just emerging from the mud," he said. "The Brute still lurks in all of us. Watch him or he'll catch you out. And remember the only thing the Brute understands is the Big Stick. Without it he'll either go to sleep — like Ernie; or pounce on some one who has gone to sleep — like Alf."

Mr. Pigott drew himself up. There was about him the dignity of conviction.

"Mr. Trupp," he said. "Fear never made a man yet. Faith's the thing."

The Doctor lifted his shrewd kind face, and eyed the other through his pince-nez.

"Fear plays its part too," he said. "We none of us can do without the Lash as yet."

CHAPTER XVI

FATHER, MOTHER AND SON

THERE was no difficulty with Edward Caspar. He had made an immense effort and fought about the Colonies. Easily spent, he would not fight again. Moreover, Ernie committed to the Army was committed for a few years only, and not for life; and some of his service might very well be passed in England. In Edward Caspar too, pacifist though he personally inclined to be, there was no inherited prejudice to overcome: for the Beauregards had been soldiers for generations.

Mr. Trupp came to talk things over; and that evening, as father and son sat together in the study, Edward Caspar said out of the silence, very quietly,

"Boy-lad, it's best you should go."

"I shall go all right, dad," the boy answered, feigning a cheerfulness he by no means felt. "Don't you worry."

"Mother wants it," the other continued.

"She's all right, mother is," said the lad.

It was settled that the boy should go over to Lewes and enlist in the Hammer-men at the depôt there, on Saturday.

The decision made, his mother relaxed somewhat. While she still kept Ernie without money, she allowed him cigarettes.

Father and son sat together and smoked in the evenings, watching the trees swaying against the blue in the Rectory Garden across the road.

Alf reported surreptitiously to his mother that Ern was smoking with dad.

"What's it to do with you if he is?" answered the other tartly.

The catastrophe which had severed the frayed string that joined the mother and her eldest son had reacted unfavourably on her relations with Alf.

The few days before Ern's departure went with accustomed speed.

On the last evening, as he and his father sat together, studying their toes in the twilight, a small fire flickering in the grate, Edward Caspar spoke out of the dark which he had been waiting to cover him.

"Boy-lad, I can't do by you as I should wish," he said tremulously. "But here's a bit of something to show you I mean well."

In the half light he thrust an envelope towards his son.

Ern opened it and saw that it contained a five-pound note.

The great waters surged up into his throat and filled his eyes.

"Here! I can't keep this, dad," he said chokily. "I'm all right. I've got . . ."

The old man — for such he was to his son, though not yet fifty — waved his hand irritably.

"Put it away," he said, "put it away. Let's hear no more of it."

Ernie sat dumb, moved and wondering.

Where had dad got the money from?

He knew very well that his mother jealously controlled the family purse, doling out rare sixpences or shillings to his father; and he knew why.

The boy's brain moved swiftly.

"What's the time, dad?" he asked, and lit the gas.

The clock on the mantel-piece never went: for it was Edward Caspar's solitary household task to wind it up.

The father, by no means a match for his artful son, produced from a baggy pocket a five-shilling Waterbury watch in place of the old gold hunter that had come to him from Lady Blanche's father, the twelfth Earl Ravensrood.

His ruse successful, Ernie delivered a direct attack.

"Where's the ticket, dad?" he asked casually.

"What ticket?"

"The pawn-ticket."

"I don't know," irritably. "Don't worry me. Turn out the light. I want to get a nap."

Ernie obeyed.

Soon Edward Caspar's breathing told its own tale.

Ernie rose, and, knowing his father's habits well as he knew his own, put his hand into the Jacobean tankard that stood on the book-shelf.

There he found what he sought.

Quietly he went out into the passage.

On the ticket was the name he expected: Goldmann, the Jew pawn-broker in the East-end off the Pevensey Road.

For a moment he paused, fingering the brown cardboard ticket under the gas light.

It would not take him an hour to get down to Goldmann's and back; for the tram almost passed the door; but he hadn't got the redemption money. He hadn't got a penny in the world. Alf had seen to that.

With the impetuous gallantry peculiar to him he made up his mind and opened the kitchen-door. Where Ernie loved he would risk anything, face anybody — even his mother.

She sat in her Windsor chair by the fire, a Puritan, still beautiful, reading her Bible as she always did at this hour; and her silvering hair added to her distinction.

All their married life the pair had sat thus of evenings, Edward in the study, Anne Caspar in the kitchen.

The strange couple rarely met indeed except at night. And the arrangement was not of Edward Caspar's making, but of his wife's. It may be that in part the woman preferred the kitchen as the environment to which she was most used: it was still more that she had determined from the outset of their union never to intrude upon her husband's spiritual life, or attempt to encroach upon a mind she could not understand. Her duty was as clear to her from the first as were her limitations. She could and would cherish, support, protect, and even chasten her husband where it was necessary for his good. For the rest she was resolved to be no hindrance or inconvenience to him. He should gain by his marriage and not lose by it. Therefore from the start she had slammed the door without mercy or remorse on her own relatives.

When Ern entered, she looked up at him not unkindly through her spectacles.

"What is it, Ernie?" she asked.

He rushed out his request.

"Please, mum," he panted, "could you let me have a shilling?"

He was determined not to give his father away.

To his relief his mother rose without a word, went to a drawer, unlocked it, took out half a sovereign and gave it to him.

Ernie ran out without his hat, took the old horse-bus at Billing's Corner, and riding on the top under a night splendid with stars that hung in the elms of Saffrons Croft, he went down the hill, through the Chestnuts, past the railway station, and along the gay main-street.

Just before Cornfield Road reaches the sea he exchanged the horse-bus for the electric tram that swung him down Pevensey Road through the thronged and always thickening East-end.

At the *Barbary Corsair* in Sea-gate he descended, turned down a side-street, and entered a door over which hung the three golden balls taken from the coat-of-arms of the banker Medici.

Mr. Goldmann was a short, fair Jew, without a neck, immensely thick throughout, though still under thirty. When he walked he carried his arms away from his side as though to aid him to inflate; and winter or summer he could be found behind his counter, perspiring freely. His trousers were always too short, and his little legs protruded from them like pillars. He spoke Cockney without a trace of Yiddish. His manner was hearty; but he was honest of his kind. The police had nothing against him, while his innumerable clients complained less of him than of his rivals.

Ern in the past had dealt with him.

"How much?" he asked, presenting the ticket.

"Only two-pence," said Goldmann, and took the watch out of the case.

He handled it with care, almost covetously, burnishing it on his sleeve.

"What arms is them?" he asked, displaying the back.

Ernie didn't know.

"If it had been any man but your father left it, I'd have communicated with the police," said the pawn-broker cheerfully.

"Will you do it up in a piece of paper, please?" Ern requested.

The Jew obeyed.

"Lend me your stylo alf a mo," said Ernie, and wrote on the paper covering the word *Dad*.

Then he raced home and re-entered the kitchen.

It was after ten, but his mother was still up, and apparently unconscious of the lateness of the hour.

Ern, panting from the speed at which he had travelled, paid nine shillings and four pence into his mother's lap.

Tram and bus had cost him sixpence, and the redemption money the rest.

"Eightpence all told," he gasped, "what I wanted. Only a little something for dad. I'll send you the odd money when I draw me first pay." He put the little packet on the mantel-piece. "Will you give that to dad, please, when I'm gone, mum?"

His mother looked at him, a rare sweetness in her eyes.

"You may keep the change, Ern," she said gently.

Collecting the money from her lap, she handed it back to him.

A moment he demurred, taken aback; then slipped the cash into his trouser pocket, mumbling and deeply moved.

"Thank you kindly, mum," he muttered.

Her eyes were still on his face, and he could not meet them.

"You're a good lad, Ern," she said quietly.

The words, and the way of saying them, moved the lad more than all her rebuffs and brutalities in the past had done. His chest began to heave. She stood before him stiff as a blade of steel, as slight and straight.

For a second she laid her hand, fine still for all its toil, upon his arm.

"Go up to bed now," she said in the same very quiet way.

He went hurriedly.

There were few things which happened in that house of which Anne Caspar was not aware. That morning on rising she had missed her husband's watch on the dressing-table — and had said nothing. Later she had found the pawn-ticket in the tankard — and again had held her peace.

A wife before all things, yet to some extent a mother, she had known, had understood, had perhaps sympathized.

CHAPTER XVII

ERNIE GOES FOR A SOLDIER

NEXT day, after dinner, when she heard Ern's feet slowly descending the stairs, and knew he was coming to say good-bye, Anne Caspar shoved Alf roughly out of the kitchen.

"You wait your brother outside," she said. "Take his bag now, and carry it to the bus for him. Be a brother for once!"

"Well, I was going to," answered Alf, aggrieved.

Since the catastrophe he had kept discreetly in the background.

Ern entered the kitchen, uncertain of himself, uncertain of his reception; but, true to the best that was in him, trying to carry a pale feather of gallantry.

"I guess it's about time to be off, mum," he remarked huskily.

His mother shut the door behind him gently, and drew him to her.

"Kiss me, Ern," she said.

The boy gasped and obeyed.

"Now go and say good-bye to dad," continued his mother, quiet, firm, authoritative.

As he went into the passage, he heard the kitchen-door close behind him.

Ern was his father's son, and nothing was to be allowed to intrude in the parting between the two.

Edward Caspar stood before the fire in quilted dressing-gown, somewhat faded now.

In its appointed place on the chair beside his chair lay the familiar manuscript, much as Ern had known it since his childhood, save that the titles on the covering page were type-

written now — *The Philosophy of Mysticism,* Part I, *The Basis of Animism.*

His father's colourless hair was greying fast and becoming sparse; while his always ungainly figure was losing any shape it had ever possessed.

At fifty Edward Caspar was already old. But age had enhanced the wistfulness which had marked him, even in youth. His was the face of a man who has failed, and is conscious of his failure; but it was the face of a Christian, gentle and very sad. Here clearly was a man of immense parts, scholar, thinker, artist, who, somehow baffled by the wiles of Nature, had failed to make good.

Yet in spite of his failure there were few who could more surely rely upon the limitless resources of the Spirit in the hour of his need than Edward Caspar.

And now in this great moment of his life, when he was parting from his dearest, he summoned to his aid all the powers that, massed unseen in the silence, await our call.

There was a wonderful dignity and restraint about him.

Ern, the most intuitive of lads, felt it and drew from his father's strength.

Simply and beautifully father and son kissed.

A moment the eyes of each rested in the other's.

Then it was over.

No one of us is entirely inhuman.

Something of the spirit of the scene enacted in the study had conveyed itself even to Alf awaiting in the road outside, Ern's bag at his feet.

He was blinking when his brother, blowing his nose, joined him.

Ern glanced at the green rampart of the Downs rising like a wall at the end of the road, and huge Shadow Coombe where the lambs were folded in March and where once he had passed a night in the shepherd's hut.

Ern waved to them and Beech-hangar beyond.

"Good-bye, old Downs!" he called. "You and me been good old pals!"

Then they set off for the bus at Billing's Corner, neither speaking, neither wishing to, Alf carrying his brother's bag.

Both youths were slight and colt-like, yet with loose unshackled limbs; Ern rather smart, Alf distinctly shabby.

The Rector, tall and titupping, emerged from his gate as they passed, but refrained from seeing them. He did not approve of the two Caspar boys — in the main because they were the sons of their father.

Canon Willcocks aped — successfully enough — the walk and deportment of a thoroughbred weed. His face — which was aquiline — inspired his pose, which was aristocratic and satirical. His solitary hero was Louis Napoleon, whom he had worshipped from childhood. And he bore himself habitually as one who is too fine for the coarse world in which he dwells perforce. The two brothers nudged each other as he stalked by. Then they climbed to the box-seat of the old bus and established themselves beside the driver.

"Where away then?" he asked, seeing the bag.

"Off to see the world, Mr. Huggett," answered Ern, already cheering up. "Goin for the week-end to the North Pole, me and Alf!"

The bus jolted down the street, past the long-backed church with its mighty tower looking down upon the Moot as it had done for five centuries, and stopped opposite the *Star*. Ern for the last time touched the old coaching bell with the driver's whip. As it clanged sonorously, a window in the Manor-house opened.

Ern looked up to see Mrs. Trupp and her daughter, a fair flapper now, waving at him with eyes that smiled and shone.

"Good-bye!" they called. "Good luck!"

Saffrons Croft was white with cricketers as they passed. The honest thump of the ball upon the bat, the recumbent groups under the elms, even the imperious voice of Mr. Pigott umpiring on Lower Pitch, moved Ern strangely.

Alf's presence somehow helped him to be hard.

At the Central Station the boys got down.

They paced the platform, waiting for the train.

Alf babbled at large, his brother paying little heed.

"Be the making of you!" Alf was saying in his rather patronizing way. "See the world! — knock about! — come home a full-blown Hammer-man with a fat pension and a V.C. on your chest and a Colonel's commission! And we'll

all meet you at the stytion with a brass band playing *See the Conquering Hero Comes!* and be proud of you. I'd come along meself for company, only I'm too small."

Ern roused from his dreams.

"What will you do then?" he asked, faintly ironical.

"Me?" cried Alf, starting off on his favourite topic. "I ain't a-goin to stop in Beachbourne all me life, you lay. When I'm through me apprentice they may send me to the River Plate. Got a big branch there. England's used up. There's chances in a new country for a chap that means to get on."

Ern installed himself in a smoking carriage.

"O, reservoir," said Alf, facetious to the end.

"See ye again some day," answered Ern, puffing away and exhibiting a man-of-the-world-like stoicism he did not feel.

He took off his Trilby hat, unbuttoned the overcoat with the velvet collar, and opened his orange-coloured *Answers*.

The train moved on. The brothers waved. Alf stood on the platform, a mean little figure with a dishonest smile; his clothes rather shabby, his trousers too short and creased behind the knees.

Then he turned to the bookstall and asked if *Motor Mems*, the paper on the new industry, had arrived yet.

Ern leaned back in his corner; and his eyes sought, between hoardings and roofs of crowded railway-shops, the familiar outline of the Downs which would accompany him to Lewes — and far beyond.

BOOK III
THE SOLDIER

CHAPTER XVIII

ERNIE GOES EAST

THE Army did for Ernie neither what Mr. Trupp hoped nor what Mr. Pigott feared.

Ernie was in truth very much the modern man, and had absorbed unconsciously the spirit of industrial democracy. He was open-minded, intelligent and sincere. The false idealism that is at the back of all Militarism, the bully-cum-bluff principle that has been the creed of the barrack-square at all times all over the world, from Sparta to Potsdam, made no appeal to him. In the British Army, it is true, there was even at that date little of the spirit of orthodox Militarism, but the shadow of the Continental System and the heritage of a false tradition still hung over it.

He found himself plucked out of the world of to-day with its quick flow of ideas, its give and take, its elasticity, its vivid unconscious spirituality, and plunged back into the darkness of medievalism: forced labour, forced worship, forced obsequiousness, a feudal lord against whom there was no appeal, with corrupt retainers who squeezed the serf without mercy.

When his first drill-instructor in a moment of patronizing confidence informed the squad of which Ernie was a member that " It's swank as makes the soldier," others were amused; but Ernie, who giggled dutifully with the rest, thought how silly and how disgusting.

Ernie always remembered that drill-sergeant's illuminating remark, and placed it alongside that of a veteran Colonel, dating from Crimean days, who said in Ernie's hearing with the offensive truculence that a certain type of officer still thinks he owes it to himself and to his position to cultivate,

" That man's no good to me." He was speaking of a Company Sergeant-Major who had the manners of a gentle-

man. "Take him away and shoot him. I want a man who'll chuck his chest, and beat his leg, and own the barrack square."

Ernie saw very soon that the Army system was based on the old two-class conception with an insuperable barrier between the two classes, and the underclass deprived of the right to appeal, the right to combine, the right to strike. And he saw equally clearly, and with far more surprise, that in spite of its obvious limitations, and openness to brutality and abuse, the system worked astonishingly well, given good officers — and his own were unusually good upon the whole.

Ernie did not know that the barrack was in fact the heir of the old monastic habit and tradition with its herding together of males, its little caste of priests who alone possessed the direct access to God denied to common men, its sacrosanct dogmas, its insuperable prejudices, its life of unquestioning obedience to authority with the consequent thwarting of intellectual and spiritual development that is the outcome of free communion between man and man; and on the other hand its genuine religious fervour, its abnegation, its devotion to duty, and disinterested service of the Commonwealth.

Ern, it is true, who realized some of these things and was dimly conscious of others, was different from most of his mates and superior to them: rather more intelligent and much more refined. The bulk of them were the conscripts of Necessity; some, like himself, had made mistakes; a few, nearly always themselves the sons of old soldiers, were genuine volunteers.

And yet Ern was by no means unhappy. If he was something of a critic, he was not in the least a rebel. At first the pressure of discipline served to brace the boy, as Mr. Trupp had anticipated. Moreover, if he vaguely apprehended what was vicious in the military system, there was much he could not fail to enjoy, because he was young, virile and healthy; and not a little he could honestly admire. He loved the drill: the rhythmical marching *en masse,* the movements of great bodies of men swinging this way and that like one, actuated by a single purpose, directed by a single mind, worshipping a single God enthroned at the saluting-point,

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satisfied his religious spirit, exalted and transfigured him as did nothing he was to know in later days. The outdoor existence, the hard athleticism, the good fellowship, and above all the communal life, appealed to all that was best in him. Indeed in this organization, abused by advanced thinkers in Press and Parliament alike, he was to find a fullness of corporate life, an absorption of the individual in the mass, a bee-like enthusiasm for the hive, such as he was never to discover outside the Army in after years.

Moreover there was a goal held before his eyes, as it is held before the eyes of all young English soldiers.

That goal was India.

The *Shiny* was the Private Soldier's Paradise, the old hands would tell the young in the canteens at night.

"Things are different there, my boy. In the *Shiny* a swoddy's a gentleman. Punkah-wallahs to pull the cords in the hot weather, a tiger curled at your feet to keep the snakes at bay, bearer to clean your boots, shooting parties, bubbly by the barrel, I don't know what all."

Because of this jewel that was for ever dangled before his eyes, Ernie bore a good deal without complaining.

A youth who had enlisted with him, and for much the same reason, induced his people to buy him out after six months.

Ernie made no such attempt.

"I'm going through with it now," he said. "Want to see a bit before I'm done and take em home a tale or two."

After a spell of service in Ireland, at the close of the South African War, when Ernie was turned twenty, the expected call came.

A draft was going out to join the First Battalion of the Hammer-men at Jubbulpore, and Ernie went with it.

The cheering transport dropped down the Thames one misty November afternoon, passing hay-laden barges, timber ships from the Baltic, and rusty tramps from all over the world.

The smell of the sea, so familiar and so good, thrilled Ernie's susceptible heart. It spoke to him of home, of the unforgotten things of childhood, of his passing youth, of much that was intimate and dear. He spent most of that

first evening on deck, long after dark, in spite of the drizzle, watching the coast lights.

Once they passed quite close to a light-ship, swinging desolately on the tide.

"What's that?" he asked a sailor.

"Sovereign Light," the man told him.

Ernie leapt to the name familiar to him from childhood.

How often had he not climbed the hill behind his home of winter evenings, and waited in the chalk-pit above the larch spinney for that far-off spark to leap out of the darkness and warm his expectant heart.

He swung about and stared keenly through the gloom at a light winking at them from the land.

"Then that's the light-house under Beau-nez!" he said, pointing.

"That's it," the man answered. "And Beachbourne underneath. All them lights strung out like a necklace along the coast,— Bexhill, Hastings, Beachbourne. It's growing into a great place. D'you know it?"

Ernie's heart and eyes were full.

"My home's there," he said. "And my old dad."

He stayed on deck peering through the darkness, till the last light had disappeared and they had swung round Beau-nez into the Channel and he could see the Seven Sisters, the gap that marks the mouth of the Ruther, and the cliffs between Newhaven and Rotting-dean. Then he went below and turned in.

Thereafter, his home behind him, he began to taste the new life, the life of adventure.

He felt the surge of the Atlantic, saw whales spouting in the Bay, marked off the coast of Portugal a lateen sail which first whispered of the East; gazed up at the Rock of Gibraltar, noted there caparisoned Barbs, their head-stalls studded with turquoises to keep the Evil One away, welcomed the Mediterranean sun, and gazed at the snow-capped hills of Crete.

In Port Said he landed and saw his first mosque. He examined it with interest.

Very bleak-like, he wrote home to Mr. Pigott. *More like a chapel than a church. And more like the Quaker Meet-*

ing-house in the Moot than either. No stained glass or crucifixes or nothing. I was more at home there than the Catholics.

In the Canal he marked the black hair-tents of the travelling Bedouins, and saw a British Camel Corps trekking slowly across the desert against the hills beyond. He sweated in the Red Sea and gazed with awe at the sultry rocks of Aden, and followed with delight the flying-fish skimming across the Indian Ocean.

Then one dawn the engines stopped; the ship lay at rest; and in his nostrils, blown from the land, there was the smell of incense.

"Makes you think of the Queen of Sheba," said Ernie. "Spices and Tyre and Sidon and all the rest," and he closed his eyes and saw Mr. Pigott standing with the pointer before the black-board, addressing his class.

"Not alf," said his unimaginative friend. "Give me the Pevensey Road o Sadaday nights. Fried fish and chips."

They went on deck to find themselves lying in the lovely island-sprinkled harbour of Bombay; boats with curved bamboo yards and brown-skinned crews of pirates under the ship's side; and Parsee money-lenders in shining hats on deck offering to change the money of those who had any.

Ernie looked across to the land, lifting blue in the wondrous dawn — the land that was to be his home for the next six years.

CHAPTER XIX

THE REGIMENT

ERNIE joined his Battalion in the Central Provinces. The Forest Rangers, as famous in the South Country as the Black Watch in the Highlands, and of far longer pedigree, was first raised from the iron-ore workers by the Hammer Ponds on the Forest Ridge in the heart of the then Black Country of England to meet the imminent onslaught of the Spanish Armada. In those days the Hammer-men, as they were called familiarly from the start, watched the coast from the mouth of the Adur to Rye and Winchelsea; and in the succeeding centuries they left their bloody mark upon the pages of history, the memories of their fellow-countrymen, and the bodies of the King's enemies.

The most ancient of English regiments, it carries on its colours more honours than any but the 60th. For more than three tumultuous centuries it has been distinguished even in that British Infantry which has never yet encountered in war its match or its master. The splendid foot-soldiers of Spain broke in Flanders before its thundering hammer-strokes; in Flanders and elsewhere in later times the legions of Imperial France surged in vain against its bayonets; and in our own day the Prussian Guard, as insolent and vain-glorious as the veterans of Napoleon, has recoiled before the invincible stubbornness of the peasants of Sussex.

The officers were drawn almost exclusively from two or three of the oldest public-schools. Ernie found they were keen soldiers, and efficient, immensely proud of their regiment, athletic, and better-mannered than most. But as a whole they were singularly stupid men, deliberately blind to the wonders of the country in which they lived, proud of their blindness, and cultivating their insularity. There was one shining exception.

When the new draft paraded for inspection, a scarecrow Major wearing the South African ribands walked slowly up and down the ranks with a word for each man. He was very tall, and so lean as to be almost spectral. His voice was charming and leisured, reminding Ernie of his father. He was friendly too, almost genial. It was obvious that he based his authority on his own spiritual qualities and not on the accident of his position. There was no rattling of the sabre, no fire-eating, no attempt to put the fear of God into the hearts of the recruits.

When he came to Ernie, he asked,

"What name?"

"Caspar, Sir."

The Major looked at the lad from beneath his sun-helmet with sudden curiosity.

"Are you . . ." he began, and pulled himself up short. "I hope you'll be happy as a Hammer-man," he said, and passed on.

Later he addressed the draft in a gentle little speech of the kind that annoyed his brother-officers almost past bearing.

"You have all heard of Death and Glory," he began. "Well, in this country there's a certain amount of Death going about, if you care to look out for it, but very little Glory. You have also heard no doubt from your mothers and the missionaries that the black man is your brother. It may be so. But in this country there are no black men and therefore no brothers. There are brown men who are your remote cousins; and they aren't bad fellows if you keep them in their place, and remember your own. On Sundays there is church for those who like it; and the same for those who don't. For the rest, whether you are happy or the reverse depends in the main upon your health, and your health depends in the main on yourselves. Be careful what you drink, and don't suck every stick of sugar-cane a native offers you. Remember you are Hammer-men and not monkeys. Most of you are men of Sussex, as are most of your officers; and we all know that the Sussex man *wun't be druv*. But discipline is discipline and must be maintained. We don't hammer each other more than we can help, nor do we hammer the natives more than is good for them. We exist to hammer the King's

enemies. And now I wish you all well and hope you'll find the Regiment a real home."

Major Lewknor's long spidery legs carried him back to the bungalow where his wife awaited him.

She was a little woman, clearly semitic, fine as she was strong, with eyes like jewels and the nose of an Arab.

"My dear," said the Major, "in your young days did you ever hear of one Hans Caspar?"

"My Jock, did I ever hear of one Napoleon Buonaparte?" mocked his mate. "What about him?"

"I was at Trinity with his son," replied the Colonel.

"We used to call him Hathri. A charming fellow, and a brilliant scholar, but ——"

"What about him?" said Mrs. Lewknor, who seemed suddenly on the defensive.

"His son has just joined us," answered the Major. "In the ranks."

The lady handled the sugar-tongs thoughtfully. Her memory travelled back more than twenty years to a great ball in Grosvenor Square, and the timid son of the house, a gawky, awkward fellow with a reputation for shyness and brilliance. He could not dance, but under the palms in the conservatory, tête-à-tête, he could talk — as Rachel Solomons had never heard a man talk yet — of things she had never heard talked about: of a place called Toynbee Hall somewhere in the East End; of a little parson named Samuel Barnett; of the group of young University men — Alfred Milner, Arnold Toynbee, Lewis Nettleship — he and his wife were gathering about them there with the aim of bridging the gulf between Disraeli's Two Nations; of the hopes of a redeemed England and a new world that were rising in the hearts of many. That young man saw visions and had made her see them too. She had cut two dances to listen to that talk, and when at last an outraged partner had torn her away and Edward had said in his sensitive stuttering way, his face shining mysteriously,

"Shall we ever meet again?"

She had answered with astonishing emphasis,

"We must."

But they never did. Fate swung his scythe; her father

died and she had to abandon her London season. Edward Caspar went abroad to study at Leipzig. And next winter she met her Hammer-man and launched her boat on the great waters.

But she had never forgotten that mysterious half-hour in which the trembling young man had knocked at her door, entered her sanctuary; and she, Rachel the reserved, had permitted him to stay.

At that moment Reality had entered her life — unforgettable and unforgotten.

India from the first tantalized Ernie. It was for him a mysterious and beautiful book, its pages for ever open inviting him to read, yet keeping its secret inviolate from him; for he could not read himself and there was no one to read to him. His officers, capable at their work, and good fellows enough in the main, Ernie soon discovered to be illiterate to an almost laughable degree. They not only knew nothing outside the limited military field, but they took a marked professional pride in their ignorance.

Ernie, used to his father's large philosophical outlook on any subject, his scholarly talk, his learning, was amazed at the intellectual apathy and crustacean self-complacency, sometimes ludicrous, more often naïf, occasionally offensive, of those set in authority over him.

Major Lewknor was the solitary exception. He was the one University man in the Regiment, and, whether as the result of a more catholic education or a more original temperament, he always stood slightly apart from his brother-officers. When he was a young man they had mocked at him quietly; now that he was a field officer they stood somewhat in awe of his ironical spirit. Some of his more dubious sayings were handed on religiously from last-joined subaltern to last-joined subaltern. The worst of them — his famous — *Patriotism is the last refuge of every scoundrel* — was happily attributed by the Army at large to a chap called Johnston who, thank God! was not a Hammer-man at all, but a Gunner or a Sapper or something like that. A Sapper probably. It was just the sort of thing you would expect a Sapper to say: for Sappers wore flannel shirts and never washed.

But if the Major was undoubtedly critical of what was obsolete and theatrical in the Service that he loved, few possessed a deeper reverence or more intimate understanding of the much that was noble in it.

"After the really grand ritual of a big ceremonial parade," he would say, "when you actually do transcend yourself and become one with the Larger Life, for grown men in an age like ours, to be herded at the point of the bayonet into a tin-pot temple to hear a gramophone in a surplice droning out an unintelligible rigmarole every Sunday in the name of religion — why it is not only redundant, it's a blasphemous farce that every decent man *must* kick against."

In spite of his caustic humour the Major's passion for the Regiment, to which he had given his life, steadfastly refusing all those staff-appointments for which he was so admirably fitted, was genuine as it was profound. Because of it, his much-tried brother officers, who loved him deeply if they feared him not a little, forgave him all. And if he was sadly unorthodox in many respects, as for instance that he was not a hard and fast Conservative, he was jealously orthodox in others as in that contempt for politicians which is almost an obsession amongst the men of his profession, perhaps because to them it falls to pay the price of the mistakes of their masters at Westminster.

The Major and his wife were in brief distinguished from their kind by the fact that they were mentally alive, sympathetic, keen, and knowledgeable. They had passed most of their lives in the East, and were of the few of their fellow-countrymen who had made the most of the opportunities vouchsafed to them. Indeed it was said in the Regiment that what the pair didn't know about India was not worth knowing.

Once at a halt on a route-march Ernie saw the Major, standing gaunt and helmeted in the shade of a banyan tree, take a pace out into the road.

A native, carrying two sealed pitchers slung from the ends of a bamboo, was padding down the road in the dust between the ranks of the soldiers who had fallen out.

The Major spoke to him, then turned to Ernie who was standing by.

"See that man, Caspar," he said quietly. "He's a pilgrim. He's tramped all the way from Hardwar, the source of the Ganges, to get holy water — seven hundred miles. What about that for faith?"

"Fine, sir," said Ernie, with quiet enthusiasm.

"In the days of Chaucer we used to do the same kind of thing in England," continued the Major. "Ever read the 'Canterbury Tales'?"

"Dad's read em to me, sir — in bits like."

The Major moved away.

Close by a group of officers, whose faces clearly showed how profoundly they disapproved of this conversation, were sprawling in the shade. *That was the way to lose caste with the men.* Amongst them was a last-joined lad, chubby still; the other was Mr. Royal of Ernie's company.

"What did the Major say he was?" asked the Boy keenly.

"I don't know what the Major said he was," answered Mr. Royal coolly. "And between ourselves I don't greatly care. *I* know what he was. And if you'll ask me prettily I might impart my information."

"What was he?" asked the Boy.

"He was a coolie," said Mr. Royal. "India's full of them. In fact they're the dominant class."

"I thought he looked something a bit out of the ordinary," said the snubbed Boy.

"Did you?" retorted Mr. Royal. "I thought myself he looked as if he wanted kicking. And as I've got five years' service to your three months it may be presumed that I'm right."

CHAPTER XX

ERNIE IN INDIA

THE Regiment was wonderfully well run for the men on its social side, for the Colonel was a bachelor, and much was trusted to Mrs. Lewknor.

She was at Ernie's bedside the day after he had his first attack of fever.

The little lady, so delicate, yet so strong, stood above the lad whose mother she might have been with a curious thrill.

He was so like his father, yet so unlike; and he was not only sick of fever, but dreadfully homesick too.

Mrs. Lewknor knew all about that, and the cure for it.

"Tell me about your people, Caspar," she said, after the ice had been broken.

The lad unloosed the flood-gates with immense relief.

He talked of Beachbourne, of Rectory Walk with the virginia-creeper on the wall and the fig-tree at the back; of his mother, of Mr. Pigott, even of Alf, and all the time of dad and the Downs.

On rising to go, Mrs. Lewknor said that when she came next day she would read to him.

"What shall I read?" she asked.

"Would you read me Matthew Arnold's *Scholar-Gypsy*?" said the boy.

Mrs. Lewknor looked down at the lad with brilliant eyes.

"Is that your father's favourite?" she asked.

"One of them, 'm. Wordsworth's *the* one."

There was only one man in the Regiment who possessed a Matthew Arnold, but that man happily was Mrs. Lewknor's husband.

Next day, as the little lady read the familiar lines, Ernie lay with eyes shut, the tears pouring down his face.

"Takes me right back," he said at last as she finished.

" I'm not here at all. I'm laying just above the Rabbit-walk over Beech-hangar, with the gorse-pods snapping in the sun, and the beech-leaves stirring beneath me, and old dad with his hat over his eyes and his hands behind his head reciting."

That afternoon Mrs. Lewknor told Mr. Royal, who had dropped in to tea, that she had been reading Matthew Arnold to a man in his company.

Mr. Royal looked blank.

He had cold, speedwell blue eyes, that seemed all the brighter for his curly dark hair, a fine skin, rather pale, and an always growing reputation for hard efficiency.

" Matthew Arnold! " he said. " And who might Mr. Matthew Arnold be? "

He said it a thought aggressively. It was clear that not only had he never heard of Matthew Arnold, but that he would have considered it bad form to have done so.

" I believe he was a poet who seldom went to church," said the Major in the chí-chí voice which he could imitate to the life.

" Indeed," said Mr. Royal. " A poet! — Ah, I'm too busy for that sort of thing myself." He said it with a crushing air of finality.

When he had gone, Mrs. Lewknor looked at her husband with deprecatory eyes.

" My Jock," she said with a little sigh, " tell me! — Is it the system? — is it the man? — What is it? "

The Major sat upright on a little hard chair.

His eyes twinkled maliciously in his somewhat bony head. He looked like a gaunt satyr.

" My dear," he said, " in the British Army you must do as the British Army does. And there is one thing which the British Army *Will Not* tolerate, and that is — a cultivated mind."

" I don't think that's peculiar to the Army," replied Mrs. Lewknor. " The attitude's characteristic of our race."

Mr. Royal was not in fact popular among his brother officers. His superiors complained that his manner was slightly insolent, his juniors that it was so damn superior. The men liked him for his efficiency, and some women admired him — too much it was whispered.

Mrs. Lewknor followed Ernie's military career with quiet interest. Not that there was very much to follow: for Ernie, apart from the cricket-field, had no career.

He did not seek promotion, and was not in fact offered it. As Mr. Royal very truly said,—" He can't come it enough to make an N.C.O." The habit of authority indeed sat ill on his shoulders; but he was liked by officers and men; and his cricket gave him a place in the regimental team.

But there was little in Army life to do for Ernie the one thing essential self demands — encourage growth; and not a little to repress it.

When the first newness had worn off, Ernie was spiritually unsatisfied and solitary.

The grosser vices of the men never appealed to him, and the men themselves were not his sort. To get away from them he sometimes wandered far a-field, poking and prying into the temples of the various sects, and not seldom found himself in the crowded streets of the native city, a lonely khaki figure in a sun-helmet, regarding the many-coloured crowd, and asking himself, in the philosophical way he inherited from his father,

" What's the meaning of it all? "

It was on one of these rambles that the solitary incident of his career in India occurred to him.

He was standing at the foot of the hill in the native city of Lahore, watching the traffic in the narrow streets, when he saw a mem-sahib driving a tum-tum slowly through the heavy ox-traffic.

The syce for some reason had descended, and the lady was alone.

Just then a huge elephant with painted sides came swinging down the steep street, at the head of a religious procession, singing and clashing cymbals.

The lady's pony, a dun country-bred, took fright and bolted.

Ernie saw her face, quite calm beneath her solar topee, as she rushed past him, pulling at the run-away. It was Mrs. Lewknor.

A few yards down the street the wheels of the tum-tum cannoned into a sack borne by a small donkey. The donkey,

already tottering beneath his load, collapsed and lay in the dust unable to rise.

The driver of the donkey, an unsavoury giant, pock-marked, abused the mem-sahib. A crowd gathered. The religious procession was held up, the elephant swinging his trunk discontentedly and spouting showers of dust over his flanks.

Ernie didn't like the look of things, for it was common talk in the lines that the native city was mutinous.

He came up quickly. The presence of the man in khaki steadied the crowd and stopped the chatter.

"Best get out of this, 'm," he suggested. "They look a bit funny."

He took the pony's head and turned him.

"You get up alongside me then," said Mrs. Lewknor.

He obeyed.

The crowd made way. The pock-marked man began again to beat his donkey. The procession resumed its march.

"One up for the Hammer-men!" the little lady laughed, as they emerged from the gate of the native city.

"Yes, 'm," said Ernie. "Only one thing. The native city's out of bounds for me."

Mrs. Lewknor smiled.

"I'm not one of the Military Police," she said. . . .

That evening she put to her husband a question that had often puzzled her.

"Why doesn't Caspar get on?" she asked. "He's got twice the intelligence of men who go over his head."

"My dear," replied the Major with the sententiousness that grew on him with the greying years, "intelligence is the last thing we want in the ranks of the Army. Intelligence always leads to indiscipline. The Army wants in the lower ranks only one thing — what is called 'character.' And by character it means the quality of the bull who rammed his head against a brick-wall till he was unconscious and went at it again when he came round saying — *My head is bloody but unbowed.*"

During Ernie's years of service the Battalion moved slowly

North, exchanging the plains of the Central Provinces for the frosty nights and red sand-hills of the Punjauh.

Major Lewknor became Colonel; and Mr. Royal adjutant.

Ern and the new Colonel were curiously sympathetic; Ern and the adjutant the reverse.

It may be that the Colonel, unusual himself, and lonely because of it, recognized a kindred spirit in the man; it may be that he never forgot that Ern was the son of his old contemporary Hathri Caspar of Trinity; or perhaps Mrs. Lewknor played an unconscious part in the matter. It is certain that on the one occasion Ern was brought before him in the Orderly Room for a momentary lapse into his old weakness, the Colonel merely "admonished" the offender.

Captain Royal, a ruthless disciplinarian, was aggrieved.

"He's such a rotten slack soldier, sir," he complained, after the culprit, congratulating himself upon his escape, had disappeared.

"Isn't he?" said the Colonel, enjoying to the full the irritation of his subordinate. "That man'd be no earthly good except on service."

Even at the wicket indeed Ernie was only at his best when he had to try. A first-rate natural bat, he would have been left out of the regimental team for slackness but that, as the Sergeant-Major said,

"Caspar's always there when you want him most."

In fact, Ernie ended his career in the Army with something of a flourish.

The Regiment was playing the Rifle Brigade at Rawlpindi in the last round for the Holkar Cup. Half-way through the second day, when the Hammer-men were batting, a rot set in. There were still two hours to play when the last man went in.

"Who is it?" asked Mrs. Lewknor, keen as a knife.

"Your friend, Caspar, Mrs. Lewknor," answered the senior subaltern, one Conky Joe, with the beak of a penguin, the eyes of an angel, and the heart of a laughter-loving boy. "They're sending him in last for his sins in the field — which were many and grievous."

"He won't live long against their fast bowler," commented the Boy gloomily. "I know Caspar."

"I never like to differ from my superiors," said the Colonel. "But I'm not so sure."

"Nor am I," said Mrs. Lewknor defiantly.

The Colonel and his wife proved right. Ernie batted with astonishing confidence from the first. At the end of twenty minutes it was anybody's game. Royal, well into his second century, was flogging the ball all over the ground. And Ernie's clear voice—"Yes, sir! No, sir! Stay where you are!" gave new heart to the watching Hammer-men.

In the end the two men played out time with consummate ease, and were carried together off the ground.

"It was like bowling at two rocks," said one of the defeated side.

"Spiteful rocks too!" replied the other. "Stood up and slashed at you!"

The Colonel went up and shook hands with the victorious batsmen, and Mrs. Lewknor waved her parasol.

"Well done, Caspar!" she cried. "Stuck it out!"

A few days later, his time being up, Ernie was detailed for a draft for home.

The Colonel, on signing his papers, said that he was sorry to be parting, and meant it.

"Charming fellow!" he said to the Adjutant, when Ern had left the room.

"Yes," answered Captain Royal in his lofty way. "Too charming. He'll never be any good to himself or us either."

"I'm not so sure," replied the Colonel. "He's the sort that never does well except when he's got to."

That evening Ern went up to the Colonel's bungalow to say good-bye to Mrs. Lewknor.

"Where are you going?" asked the little lady.

"Back home, 'm," Ernie answered. "Old Town, Beachbourne. There's no place in the world to touch it."

Mrs. Lewknor smiled at his enthusiasm.

"I know it," she said. "The Colonel comes from those parts — Hailsham-way. Perhaps we shall follow you when we retire."

"Beachbourne!" mused the Colonel, after Ernie had departed. "Famous for two things: Mr. Trupp, the surgeon, who by a brilliant operation saved the other day the life of the man the world could have done best without, and the Hohenzollern Hotel."

"What's the Hohenzollern Hotel?" asked Mrs. Lewknor.

"My dear," said the Colonel, "Captain Royal will enlighten you in his more intimate moments."

CHAPTER XXI

THE RETURN OF THE SOLDIER

THAT first return to England after his long absence in the East always remained one of the land-marks in Ernie's life. It was a revelation to him, never completely to pass away.

The time was late April; the weather perfect. The song of mating birds rose from dew-drenched brake and bush on every hand; the spring lay like a dream of gossamer on the hedges and woodlands; the lambs and quiet cattle filled him with an immense content. His heart rose up in joy and thankfulness and humble love.

And his mates, it was clear to him, were experiencing the same transfiguring emotion. He was sure of it from the silence that grew on them as they travelled through the radiant country-side from the port at which they had landed, their noses glued to the windows of the troop-train. Gradually the vision possessed their souls like lovely music. The rowdiness, the silly songs, the bad jokes faded away. An awe stole over them as of men admitted into the Sanctuary and beholding there for the first time the beauty of the Holy One unveiled before them.

Now and then a quiet voice spoke out of the silence.

"Blime! There's a rabbit!"

"There's an English serving-maid!"

"Ain't it all solid-like?"

That solidity was one of Ernie's abiding impressions too — the massive character of this Western Civilization to which he was returning. And it stood, he was convinced, for something real: for it was based on a foundation that only the blind and gross could call materialism.

The big-boned porters trundling tinkling milk-cans along the platforms at a wayside station, the English faces, the square brick buildings, the substantial coin, confirmed the thought.

"Solid!" he echoed in his father's vein. "That's the word. Give me the West. Back there it's all a little bit o gilded gimcrack."

Once the train stopped in an embankment lined with primroses and crowned with woods, a sweet undercurrent of song streaming quietly up to heaven, like the murmur of innumerable fairy-bees.

Ernie removed his cap; and the unuttered words in his heart, as in those of his companions, were, "Let us pray!"

A few weeks later he stood on the platform of Victoria, discharged.

Deliberately he chose, to take him home, a train that stopped and browsed at all the stations with the familiar English names as it made its fussy way across the Weald through the very heart of Saxondom.

He sat in the corner, the window wide, the breeze upon his face, without a paper, reading instead the countryside as a man reads in age a poem beloved in his youth.

One by one he picked up the old land-marks — the spire of Cowfold Monastery, slender against the West, Ditchling Beacon, Black Cap, and the Devil's Dyke.

At Ardingly, where the train had stopped, it seemed, for lunch, he got out.

The Downs were drawing closer now, the blue rampart of them seeming to gather all this beauty as in a giant basin.

In the woods hard by a woodpecker was tapping. He saw a cock pheasant streaming in glorious flight over a broad-backed hedge. And across the hollow of the Weald cuckoos everywhere were calling, and flying as they called. He closed his eyes and listened. The Weald seemed to him an immense bowl of nectar, brimming and beaded. He was floating in it; and the tiny bubbles all about him were popping off with a soft delicious sound — *Cuck-oo! Cuck-oo!*

Then he came to earth to see the train bundling out of the station with a callous grin.

It was significant of Ernie's weakness and his strength that he didn't mind. Indeed he was glad.

He left the station and plunged like a swimmer into the

sea of sound and colour, opening his chest and breathing it in. The wealth of green amazed him. It filled and fulfilled his heart. He caught it up in both hands, as it were, and poured it over his thirsting flesh. Abundant, yet light as froth, it overflowed all things, hedges, woods and pastures; splashing with brightest emerald the walls and roofs of the cottages, russet-timbered and Sussex-tiled.

Here and there in an old garden, set in the green, was a laburnum like a fountain of gold, a splash of lilac in lovely mourning against the yews, a chestnut lighted with a myriad spray of bloom. The pink May had succeeded the white; and clematis garlanded the hedges. There was a wonderful stillness everywhere, and the atmosphere was bright and hard. After a dry month the grass was very forward. The oak-trees stood up to their knees in hay that was yellow with buttercups, the wind rustling through it like a tide. The foliage of the oaks was still faintly bronzed. Steadfast, old, and very grim in all this faerie, they bore themselves as lords of the Forest by right of conquest and long inheritance. Ernie nodded greeting at them. Their uncompromising air amused him. They were not his tree: for he was a hill-man; and the oaks belonged to the Weald, which in its turn clearly belonged to them. He did not love them; but he admired and respected them for their sturdy independence of character, if he laughed a little at their English self-righteousness and dogmatic air. They were of England too in their determination not to show emotion: for they appeared not to be moving; yet he could see a wind was flowing through them, while in the shadow of them mares-in-foal were flicking their tails.

Ernie recognized with joy that he was returning to the country he had left.

The gang of men he came on at the end of a lane, asphalting a main-road, the rare car dashing along with a swirling tail of dust between green hedges, disturbed but little his peace of mind.

He was home again — in Old England — the heart of whose heart was Sussex.

In the train again he sank back in a kind of pleasant trance. Two country-men in his carriage were talking

in the old ca-a-ing speech — *So cardingly I saays to herrr.* . . . Their undulating voices rocked him to sleep. He woke to find himself in Lewes, and his eyes resting on the massif of Mount Caburn.

The train wandered eastwards under the Downs, past Furrel Beacon, athwart the opening of the Ruther Valley. The Long Man of Wilmington stared bleakly at him from the flanks of hills that seemed sometimes scarred and old and worn, at others rich with the mystery of youth.

The train ran through Polefax, where the line to Romney Marsh turns off. Then with a belated effort at sprightliness it hurried through the sprawling outposts of Beachbourne.

The town had grown greatly, overspreading the foothills towards Ratton and the woods of the Decoy and skirmishing across the marshes beyond the gasworks, which, when he left, had marked the uttermost bounds of civilization.

CHAPTER XXII

OLD TOWN

WHEN Ern got out of the train on to the very platform where Alf, six years before, had prophesied his return in glory, nothing much happened.

True, the conditions were not quite as Alf had foretold. Rather the reverse. Whereas it was a dapper young clerk who had left Beachbourne, it was a solid working-man who returned to it; one who by his clothes, boots, hands, hair, and even walk, testified that he was of those who bear on their shoulders the burden of our industrial civilization. And that perhaps was why the promised brass-band was conspicuous by its absence, and there were present no fathers of the city expanding ample paunches preparatory to delivering an address of welcome to the returning soldier. Instead there was upon the platform one unkempt porter, who took his ticket very casually, and when asked by Ern whether he recognized him, replied with more honesty than tact that he didn't know but thought not.

"See, I sees so many," he remarked apologetically.

"I'm Ernie Caspar," said Ernie, noting with critical military eye that the other did not seem to have had his hair cut since last they met. "I was at the Moot School along o you. Aaron Huggett, aren't it?"

The porter's face betrayed a flicker of sardonic interest.

"I expagt you'll be Alf Caspar's brother," he said.

"That's it," Ernie answered, a thought sourly.

Back in Beachbourne he was not himself; he was just his younger brother's brother, it seemed.

Things were not quite as he had expected. Everywhere was a subtle change of atmosphere. Beside the book-stall now stood a sentry-box with glass doors. In it a man with something to his ear was talking to himself.

Ernie felt somehow disconsolate.

Outside the station, in Cornfield Road, he paused and took in the scene.

There was more traffic than of old, and it was swifter. In the country from which he came the ox was still the principal motive-power upon the roads: here clearly horses were becoming out of date.

He asked a policeman when the bus for Old Town ran.

"There she is," said the man, pointing. "On the bounce!"

Just across the street, under the particular plane-tree the starlings haunted of evenings, where in the past old Huggett in his bottle-green coat would wait indefinitely with his mouldy pair of browns, there stood a gaudy motor-bus, decked on top. A spruce conductor was pulling the bell sharply; and a board on which were printed the starting-times hung from a neighbouring lamp. It was all very precise, powerful, and efficient. Ernie was not sure whether he liked it or not.

But he had little time to think. This mechanical monster was not the old gentlemanly horse-bus with its easy tolerance. It gave no law and knew no mercy. It was swift and terrible; and its heart was of the same stuff as its engines.

He crossed the road and leapt on to the great lurching thing.

Carelessly it bore him along the Old Road to Lewes and then swung away under the Chestnuts into Water Lane.

Here at least nothing had changed but the vehicle that carried him. On his left was Saffrons Croft, just as of old, with its group of splendid elms and the Downs seen through the screen of them; in front on the hill, above the roofs of Old Town, the church-tower with its squat spire, bluff against a background of green.

Two ladies were walking down the hill, a middle-aged and gracious mother, escorted by a tall daughter.

Ernie's neighbour nudged him confidentially.

"Mrs. Trupp," he said.

Ernie leaned over. Except for the silver in her hair, his god-mother had altered little; but he would hardly have recognized in the stately young woman who walked at her side the flapper who had waved him good-bye from the nursery-window years before.

His neighbour was conveying to him information about the great surgeon.

"He's our greatest man by far. Mr. Trupp *of Beachbourne*. They come from all parts to him. He saved the Tsar of Dobrudja — when all the rest had taken to their prayers."

"Ah," said Ernie, "I think I ave eard of im."

The bus, for all its rushing manners of a parvenu, stopped opposite the *Star*; but the old beam across the road was gone.

Ernie felt himself aggrieved, and complained to the conductor as he got down.

"Well, you didn't want your head took off every time, did you?" said that unsympathetic worthy.

Ernie strolled up Church Street, living his past over again. Here at least he found the rich, slow atmosphere he had expected. There was the long-backed church standing massive and noble as of old on its eminence above the Moot; beneath it in the hollow the brown roof of the Quaker Meeting-house; and on his left the little ironmonger's shop outside which Alf had seen Mrs. Pigott and her dog Sharkie on the fatal day they sacked the walnut-tree.

At Billing's Corner he was reassured to find the high flint-wall that ran at the back of Rectory Walk making its old sharp corner and the fig-tree peeping over it. The Rectory, too, still stood in pharisaic aloofness amid gloomy evergreens. And out of it was coming the Rector, walking mincingly just as of yore.

That finikin old man had not changed much at all events, and yet . . . and yet . . . as he came closer, Ernie was aware of some subtle spiritual difference here too. At first he thought the Rector had grown. Then he recognized that the change was in the top-hat and those tall attenuated legs. They were clothed in gaiters now, and gave the wearer just that air of old-world distinction it was his passion to assume.

In fact pseudo-Canon Willcocks had in Ernie's absence become Archdeacon, to his own ineffable satisfaction and that of his lady. Now he marched down the middle of the road with his hands behind his back, in the meditative pose he always hoped passers-by would mistake for prayer.

Ernie touched his hat; and the Archdeacon with an air of

royal indifference imitated to the life from his hero, the late Emperor of the French, acknowledged the salute with an "Ah! my friend!" and titupped delicately upon his way.

Ernie, grinning, turned the corner and stopped short.

He had little notion as to what was before him.

During his absence his mother's letters, it is true, had been very regular and most curt. It was indeed astonishing how little she had contrived to tell him. His father, on the other hand, had written seldom but at length, yet never mentioning home-news; while Alf, of course, had not written at all.

Ernie was therefore in the dark as to the welcome awaiting him.

The Downs at the end of the Walk greeted him; but a row of red-brick villas on the far side the New Road imposed a barrier between him and them. True, they nodded at him friendly over the intruding roofs; but he was shut out from the great Coombe which of old had gathered the shadows in the evening and echoed in the spring to the melancholy insistent cry of lambs.

All around the builder had been busy.

When he left, the windows of Rectory Walk had looked across over rough fields to the Golf Links and Beech-hangar beyond. Now detached houses on the westward side of the road blocked the view.

His own home at least had changed not at all. The virginia-creeper was brilliant as ever on its walls; the arabis humming with bees beneath the study-window.

As he passed through the gate, his mother, who must have been waiting, opened to him quietly, and held up a warning finger.

She was beautiful still, but showing wear, as must a woman of fifty, who has never spared herself. Her hair was now snow-white; her complexion, as seen in the passage, fine as ever; her eyes the same startling blue under fierce brows, but the lines about them had an added kindness.

She led past the study-door into the kitchen, walking a little stiffly, her bones more apparent than of old.

Ern followed her with a smile, his hand scraping the familiar varnished paper, his eye catching that of the converted drain-pipe.

She was still clearly a woman of one idea — dad.

Cautiously his mother closed the door of the kitchen behind him. Then she turned and put her hands upon his shoulders.

There was something yearning in her gesture as of a puzzled child asking an explanation. Ern's quick intuitions told him that since he had last seen her his mother had lost something and was missing it. This he noticed and her hands — how worn they were. Fondly he kissed them, realizing a little wistfully that his mother now was an old woman.

She smiled at him.

"Let me see you," she said, and her eyes dwelt upon his face. For the first time in his life he felt that his mother was depending on him, and was moved accordingly.

"You're changed," she said at last. "You're a man now. But your eyes are the same."

"How's dad?" he asked.

She withdrew from his arms and turned away.

"He's an old man now, Ernie," she said. . . . "He's not what he was. . . . I don't rightly know what to make of him. . . . He goes to Meeting now." She was puzzled and pathetic.

"Has he turned Quaker?" asked Ernie.

"He says not."

Just then quiet music sounded from the study.

"Is that dad?" asked Ernie, amazed.

His mother nodded.

"One of them new-fangled machines. Pianolas, don't they call em? I give him one for his birthday."

Ernie listened in awed silence.

"That's Beethoven," he said. "I'd know it anywhere. . . . In old days we used to have to go out for that, me and dad did."

The music ceased.

"Now," said his mother, and opened the kitchen-door.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE CHANGED MAN

ERNIE went to the study-door and knocked.

"Come in," said a voice that surprised him by its firmness.

He entered.

His father stood before the fireplace almost as he had left him, save that he had discarded his dressing-gown for a loose long-tailed morning-coat of the kind worn by country gentlemen in the eighties. Physically he had changed very little, spiritually it was clear at the first glance that he was another man. The dignity which had distinguished him at the moment of parting had become his permanent possession. Some shining wind of the spirit blowing through his stagnant streets had purged him thoroughly. His colour was fresh as a child's, his eyes steady and hopeful, and there was a note of quiet exaltation about him, of expectation.

"Boy-lad," he said in deeper tones than of old, as they shook hands.

Ernie looked round like one lost.

The room, too, was as greatly changed as its inmate. But for a bowl of crimson roses on the book-shelf it might have been called austere. The Persian rug had gone, the writing-table was bare of the familiar manuscript. The book-shelves had disappeared to make way for a piano. The walls were still brown, and from them Lely's *Cavalier* looked down with faintly ironical eyes upon his descendants. It was the only picture on the walls.

"Where are the books then, dad?" Ernie asked.

"I sent them down to Fowler's," the other answered. "I've done with books — all except those."

He pointed to a single row, perhaps a dozen in all, among which Ernie recognized the blue backs of the *Golden Treasury Series,* the old edition of Wordsworth, homely as the poet

himself, and a little brown-paper bound new Testament.

Ernie sat down. Now he understood that pathetic look in his mother's eyes. His father was no longer dependent on her; and she was missing that dependency as only a woman who has given her life to propping an invalid can miss it.

"Have you joined the Friends, dad?" he asked earnestly.

The old man shook his head.

"I shall never join another sect. They're nearest the Truth, it seems to me — a long way nearest. But they aren't there yet. None of us are."

Ernie considered his father, sitting opposite him as of old, and yet how changed! In those familiar blue eyes he detected now a dry twinkle, as of an imp dancing amid autumn leaves.

Suddenly the imp leapt out and tickled him.

Ernie flung back in his chair and laughed.

The old man opposite nodded sympathetically.

Then the door in the hall opened.

Somebody had entered the passage, and was stumbling over the bag Ernie had left there.

Ernie ceased to laugh; and the imp to twinkle.

"That's your brother," said the old man almost harshly.

Ernie made no move. In the passage outside Alf was shifting the bag — with curses.

"Does he live here still?" asked Ernie, low.

"Yes," said his father. "He's got a garage of his own now. He's getting on."

"Shall I go and see him?" asked Ernie.

"There's nothing to see," his father answered in that new dry note of his. "But you'd better go and see it perhaps," he added.

Ernie rose reluctantly and went into the passage. Alf's voice came from the kitchen, dogmatic and domineering.

"Him or me. That's flat," he was saying. "House won't hold us both."

Ernie swaggered into the kitchen.

Alf was standing before the fire, very smart and well-groomed. He wore a double-breasted waistcoat, festooned by a watch-chain, from which hung a bronze cross. A little man still, with an immense head, his shoulders appeared

broad in their padded coat; but the creases in his waistcoat betrayed his hollow chest and defective physique, and his legs were small and almost shrunken in their last year's Sunday trousers.

Ernie advanced on his brother.

"All right, Alf, old son," he said. "No need to get yer shirt out. I'm not a-goin to force myself on no one."

"Al-*fred,* if you please," answered Alf, planted before the fire and caressing a little waxed moustache, which had come into being during Ernie's absence.

"Oh, you are igh," laughed Ernie.

"I am Al-*fred* to me own folk and Mr. Caspar to the rest," answered Alf, dogged and unbending.

"Come, Alf, shake hands with your brother!" scolded his mother.

Alf, his eyes still averted, extended a surly hand mechanically from the shoulder.

Ern, white and flashing, took the hand.

"There's for my brother!" he said. "And there's for Alf!" and tossed it from him.

Then he went out.

His bag was still in the hall. He was about to take it up when his father called him from the study.

"You're going to stop here?" he asked; and Ernie detected a touch of the old anxiety in his voice, a suggestion of the old tremulousness in his face and figure.

In all the tuzzles between the two brothers, Alf had over Ern the incalculable material advantage of the man who is not a gentleman over the man who is.

"I just got to go down and see Mr. Pigott after a job, dad," Ern answered soothingly. "I'll be round again later."

He went out of the house, shutting the door quietly behind him.

Anne Caspar heard it go, and looking out into the passage saw that the bag had vanished too.

"He's gone," she said.

"Army manners," muttered Alf.

"You've drove him out," continued his mother.

"Ave I?" said Alf, cleaning his nails with a penknife. "I got my way to make. I don't want no angers-on to me.

. . . Comin back on us a common soldier — not so much as a stripe to his arm, let alone a full sergeant. A fair disgrace on the family, I call it."

"All for yourself always," said his mother censoriously.

"Who else'd I be for then?" asked Alf, genuinely indignant.

"You might be for the church," answered Anne grimly.

CHAPTER XXIV

ALF

IF Ernie was now the working-man, Alf on his side was very much the gentleman.

He dressed the part to the best of his ability; and — when he remembered — even tried to talk it.

But he had not arrived at his present position without a struggle.

When he was through his apprenticeship, he left Hewson & Clarke, and inducing his mother to lend him a little capital, started a car and garage of his own in the Chestnuts between Old Town and the station.

At first he did not prosper. The horse-industry, with a tradition of tens of thousands of years behind it, would not yield its pride of place without a struggle. Competitors were many and fierce. And just when he believed that he was finding his feet at last, a big London Syndicate started the Red Cross Garages throughout Kent and Sussex.

Alf for the first time felt the full weight of capitalism — the Juggernaut with Mammon at the wheel that crushes beneath its rollers the bodies and souls of the weak and impotent.

His sense of helplessness embittered him.

His garage was empty; his car in little request; he had few repairs. Old Town at one end of Beachbourne and Holywell on the foot-hills under Beau-nez at the other were the quarters of the resident aristocracy amongst whom it was the convention to avoid "the front" as bad form. These clung to their sleek pairs and cockaded coachmen just as they clung to the Church and Joseph Chamberlain and the belief, so often re-affirmed by Archdeacon Willcocks, that Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany was the one man living who knew how to rule the masses. *The firm hand, sir!*

The doctors, on the other hand, were beginning to possess

little cars of their own which they drove themselves or had driven for them; while the progressive Town Council started motor buses and deprived Alf of some station-work. Mr. Pigott, now a radical alderman, was responsible for this last injustice.

Alf knew it, and in revenge, ceased to attend chapel.

Mr. Pigott, with an unerring eye for the defaulters of his flock, marked his absence and tackled the lost sheep on the subject.

"You've given up God then!" he said, fierce and frowning.

"There ain't none," answered Alf, as brief and brutal. "Where there's no justice, there can't be no God." His little eyes sparkled dreadfully. "Look at young Albert Hewson. He went through the shops with me. Is he as good an engineer as me? — Can he strip an engine same as me? — Can he turn to the thousandth part of an inch? — Ask the chaps in the yard. Yet because he's got all the money, been to Rugby and Oxford, they make him deputy-chairman of the Red Cross Syndicate at £1,000 a year straight from the shop, and Managing Director of Ball-Bearings, Limited, and I don't know what all."

He became a violent Socialist; spent his Sundays attending Labour demonstrations in the East-end; read Robert Blatchford in the *Clarion;* and sulked with his mother.

For a moment he even contemplated the abandonment of his ambitions.

When Mr. Pigott, after his second marriage, finally gave up schoolmastering and became Manager of the Southdown Transport Company, Alf applied for the position of working foreman.

The application was discussed at a meeting of the Directors.

"He's the chap that made the wage-slave speech to the Engineers at the Salvation Army Citadel on Labour Day," said one.

"What d'*you* think, Pigott?" asked another.

"I won't have Alf Caspar in my yard," replied the Manager with characteristic emphasis. "I know Alf."

"Then that settles it," said the chairman.

Alf rightly attributed his defeat to his old schoolmaster.

"So you've turned me down, Mr. Pigott," he said, stopping the other in Church Street a few days later.

Mr. Pigott, like most professing pacifists, was always ready for a fight.

"I thought you wanted to be a master-man!" he cried. "And here you're applying for a job as a wage-slave — to use your own term."

Alf was white, trembling, and sour-faced.

"All I want is a fair chance," he said doggedly. "And if I don't get it there'll be trouble." He came a step closer. His eyes were down, and he looked dangerous. "See here, Mr. Pigott — if you turn on full-steam same time you seal up the safety-valve, something'll burst. That's science, that is."

Mr. Pigott was not at all dismayed.

"Now look here!" he said. "You take a pull, young man. You're going altogether too far and too fast. And I'm speaking not as a magistrate but as your old schoolmaster."

At the Bowling Green Committee that evening, while the minutes were being read, he retailed the incident to Mr. Trupp.

"That little ewe-lamb o yours is turning tiger because he can't have it all his own way," he said. "Going to upset Society because he's not King."

Mr. Trupp was amused.

"Arrested development," he said. "He's an interesting study in pathology."

"Criminal pathology," muttered Mr. Pigott.

Whether in the interests of Science, or of expediency, next day Mr. Trupp rolled into Alf's garage, with a blue long-dog, a descendant of the original *She,* wearing the studded collar of her ancestress, at his heels.

No man had made a stiffer fight against the new and aggressive locomotive than the great surgeon.

Pests of the road, he called them, and refused to recognize his friends when driving them. He affirmed that they upset his horses and his patients; made the place stink; and whirled through the country-side disseminating disease in clouds of

dust. But he was no fool, and increasingly busy. A machine that could whisk him over to Lewes in little more than thirty minutes, and land him at the Metropole in Brighton in the hour, was not to be scoffed at.

Alf was cleaning his car when Mr. Trupp, greatly muffled in spite of the heat, strolled into his yard.

"Look here, Alf," growled the great man. "I'm never going to own one of those things. But I've got to use one to get about. If you like to do my driving we'll arrange something."

Alf's attitude to life changed in the twinkling of an eye.

He bustled home that evening, a new man.

"All O.K.," he called to his mother. "I got me first contract."

"What?" she asked sullenly.

"Driving for Mr. Trupp."

She took a saucepan off the fire.

"Then you're a made man," she said; and she did not exaggerate.

The job, or as Alf preferred to call it, the contract, meant honour; it meant money; it meant — above all — a start. Mr. Trupp had been for long the first surgeon in Sussex: since the operation, as daring as discreet, by which he had preserved the life of a Balkan Tsar to disgrace a throne, his fame had become world-wide.

That evening, uplifted on a wave of humility and thankfulness, Alf walked to Mr. Pigott's house and apologized to him.

"I said a lot of silly things, I know," he said. "There is a God and a good God too."

Mr. Pigott was sitting with his new wife, who was as much his junior as the first had been his senior.

She was a young woman, with a mischievous face and bright hair.

"He'll be glad to have you on His side again," she remarked demurely. "He was missing you."

Mr. Pigott scowled melodramatically at the offender.

She refused to catch his eye, busy with her work.

"Five pound a week isn't a bad God as times go," she went on.

Alf smirked.

"It's seven pound ten," he said, and withdrew.

"Elsie Pigott!" roared her husband, when the outside door had shut.

"Sir!" answered his bride, and added—"Mr. Trupp's taken him on. . . . Mrs. Trupp's furious. . . ."

Alf, in spite of his access of faith, never returned to chapel. As he remarked to his mother,

"I got me principles. And I must stick to em."

"That's it," said his mother. "Stick to em—until you want to change em."

Anne Caspar cherished now no illusions about her second son.

She no longer cared for Alf—for he was no longer dependent on her; nor did she respect him. But his naïveté, the outrageous sincerity of his egotism, appealed to a certain grim sense of humour she possessed.

CHAPTER XXV

THE CHURCHMAN

ALF, with all his faults, had at least the supreme virtue of the animal living in a fiercely competitive world: he never missed a chance.

A year after he began to drive for Mr. Trupp, he had a second car, a man driving for him, and another on repairing work.

Success sugared his political outlook, just as defeat had soured it. Like most really hard men, he saved himself in his own eyes by becoming a thorough-going sentimentalist. In the course of a year or two, King and Country had become the objects of his ferocious admiration; while the masses of his countrymen were to be dealt with as ruthlessly as expediency and the Vote would allow.

"Traitors, I call em," he confided to his new friend, the Reverend Spink. "All for their fat selves all the time. Never think of you and me. They fair give me the hic-coughs."

At the General Election of 1906 he came out fearlessly for God and the Conservative Party.

The two candidates for West Beachbourne were, as all decent men admitted, the worst who ever stood for a constituency. The sitting member had just received that which he entered Parliament to obtain — a Baronetcy; and his solitary ambition now was to be defeated. Unfortunately an aspiring wife had other views to which her spouse had to give way.

His opponent, on the other hand, had, according to the enemy, recently emerged "from a home of rest" in order to contest the constituency.

At the preceding Khaki Election the Conservative candidate, who was an undoubtedly fine whip, had secured the "Triumph of Right," as Archdeacon Willcocks finely called it, by the simple process of driving a well-appointed team through the constituency.

"I'll vote for them 'orses," had been the general verdict.

The victor now repeated his tactics.

On polling day, as a reward for his strenuous labours in the good cause, Alf was given a ride on the top of the coach among the very pick of England's aristocracy. In that fair company he meandered from public-house to public-house all a winter's afternoon, singing with his hosts hymns and spirituous songs.

In Cornfield Road, opposite the *White Hart,* Mr. Pigott, red and dusty from the battle, saw him ensconced on that bad eminence among the crimson faces and flowery hats of the enemy.

"You've changed your coat to some purpose," he bawled.

Alf leaned down.

"Yes, sir," he said quietly. "I've learned a bit, and I'm not ashamed to admit it."

The beery riders raised an aggressive cheer. And the son and heir of the candidate, snatching the horn from the hand of a footman, blew a strident blast in the ear of the outraged schoolmaster.

Alf's candidate was returned, to his no small chagrin — one of the few Tories to survive the democratic deluge of that year.

"Just a remnant of us," as Alf remarked pathetically to the Archdeacon, "that 'as not bowed the knee to Bile."

Thus earlier in life even than most of us, Alf joined the Big Battalions of those who, secure themselves, mean to make capital out of the insecurity of others.

"I'm a high old Tory," he would tell Lady Augusta Willcocks truculently. "And I don't care who knows it."

And finding quickly the necessity for, and advantage of, a religious sanction for a position that was morally untenable, he threw himself upon the bosom of the Church; and in that comfortable and accommodating community which opens wide its gates to all who prefer the Path of Compromise to the Road that leads up Calvary, he found the sustenance of which he stood in need.

Alf effected the change of religious community with considerable tact.

He began quite simply by touching his hat to the junior

curate of the parish church, when he met him in the street.

The Reverend Spink, who was a man of much the same class as Alf, was highly gratified and uplifted.

Then Alf took to saying very shyly,

"Good morning, sir," hurrying past in order not to impede by his unworthy presence the great man's view.

Next he took to dropping in to the Reverend Spink's addresses for "men only."

Here he made himself conspicuous by his thoughtfulness and the corrugations in his brow as he imbibed the teachings of his master.

One day he asked, with some confusion and stumblings of speech, a question so easy that even the curate could answer it.

Alf nodded, well satisfied.

The curate swelled in the spirit. This catechumen at the least knew what was what.

Next day Alf, greatly daring, stopped the evangelist in the street.

"Beg pardon, sir," he began diffidently. "About what you was saying last night about them Proper Prefaces . . ."

The curate amplified his explanation.

Alf drank in the milk of the Word, nodding his head.

"Ah, I never thought of that!" he said.

"Look here!" said the curate with sudden warmth. "If you're interested in those sort of things . . ."

The naughty devil who possessed Alf bobbed out and almost undid him.

"What! — Proper Prefaces!" he said, and added hastily —"and the things appertaining to em! — religion and that."

"That's what I mean," said the curate. "Come round to my rooms on Friday. Some of us meet there once a week. Jolly fellows. Come and smoke a pipe and chat!"

The Reverend Spink was deeply tainted with the hearty *bon-camarade* method which the Bishop of Fulham had recently introduced into the Church to enable it to float on the flowing democratic tide.

After that Alf went often.

The curate, who had made inquiries, found that Alf had once been, according to report, "a roaring, raving Socialist and atheist!"

"Shockin the things he used to say!" his informant told him. The curate, who was all out for sensation, was thrilled. Here was a catch indeed! — If he could but bring it off! — What wouldn't the dear Bishop of Fulham say?

His prayers were answered more swiftly than he had anticipated.

In a month the Reverend Spink had led his penitent to the baptismal font.

Alf, asked if he would like any of his people to be present at the ceremony, had shaken his head.

"See where it is, sir, Mother's chapel. She'll never forgive me — not but what I'll put up with that if it's right. And dad's I don't know what. I don't know that he knows himself."

The only people Alf invited to attend were Mrs. Trupp and her daughter. They refused politely.

As Bess said to her mother with the firmness of youth, "We are on Ernie's side. Dad may forget, but we don't."

A few weeks later the Reverend Spink went to call on Alf's father.

After he had left, Mrs. Caspar heard strange sounds in the study. She went to the door and listened.

Then she opened and peeped in.

Edward Caspar was laughing as she had never seen him laugh in twenty odd years of married life. The tears were streaming down his face, his head was thrown back and his body convulsed.

His wife regarded him with dour sympathy.

"What is it?" she asked hardly.

Her husband wiped his eyes shamefacedly.

"Nothing," he said. "Only the curate's been converting me."

That evening, as he went to bed, he peered over the banisters, and said in his grave way to Alf in the kitchen,

"I hope your friend Mr. Spink'll come again."

Alf reported the incident next day to the curate, adding,

"I will say this for dad. He *is* broad."

Mr. Trupp heard of his chauffeur's conversion.

"You're church then now, Alf," he said.

"Yes, sir," replied the other with the curious naïveté of blunted susceptibilities. "More classier. See, I'm getting on now."

And Alf did not stop at baptism.

He was thorough in religious as in secular affairs.

Next spring, after a careful preparation by the Reverend Spink, he was confirmed by the Bishop and afterwards admitted a member of the C.E.M.S.

After the ceremony, the Bishop inquired of the Rector, in the vestry, who the young man with the immense head might be.

Archdeacon Willcocks always wore a little white imperial in reverent imitation of his master, Louis Napoleon. His cult of the Third Emperor was perhaps the most genuine thing about him, and had endured for fifty years. But for a stern no-nonsense father he would have deserted Cambridge in '70 to fight for a cause already lost. And he had never forgiven the scholar at his gate who had told him that his favourite had painted his face before Sedan.

"What if he did?" he had asked sourly.

"Nothing," Edward Caspar had answered. "Only it's interesting."

"I don't believe he did."

"Did you never read Zola's *Débâcle*?" asked the other gently.

"Nevah!" cried the Archdeacon, on firm church-ground now. "I don't read Zolah!"

"Ah," said Edward. "Pity . . ."

The Archdeacon looked like a gentleman, and, to do him justice, tried hard to live up to his looks. With this end in view he had married — to his no small gratification, and that of his mother — the daughter of a Victorian Earl. In the days before he became an Archdeacon he habitually wore a top-hat, slightly battered to signify that the wearer, while an aristocrat, was not a new one. A sedulous attendant on the rich of the parish, he visited the poor by proxy; and yet by the simple process of taking off his hat with a sweep to every cottage-woman in the Moot who vouchsafed him a good-morning on his rare passages through that district, he main-

tained an easy reputation among the more conservative of the working-class as a Christian and a gentleman.

Archdeacon Willcocks was in fact a snob, but he was not a cad; whereas his junior curate was both. When, therefore, the Bishop made inquiries as to Alf, the Archdeacon gave the glory to his subordinate.

"Spink got hold of him," he said. "He was a dangerous Socialist, I believe."

The Bishop regarded with approval the chubby young man with the pursed mouth, wondering whether he should transfer him to the industrial East-end or the slums of Portslade.

A thorough-going man of the world, like most of his type, he was quite astute enough to see that the real enemy of the Institution he represented was the Labour Party; and that the danger from this quarter was growing, and would continue to grow.

When Alf returned home from the ceremony in the parish-church, his mother was taking off her bonnet in the kitchen.

She eyed him with sardonic mirth as he entered.

"Feel a change?" she asked.

"What's that?"

"Since he done it."

"Was you there then?" asked Alf.

"I was."

Alf was entirely unabashed.

"I must go with me conscience," he said, "if it was ever so."

"And we all know which way your conscience goes, Alf," his mother answered.

"Which way's that then?"

"The way the money goes."

Alf was not in the least offended. Indeed he was rather pleased. He stood in his favourite position in the window with his back to his mother and cleaned his nails with a penknife.

"Crucified for conscience' sake," he muttered. "I dare say I'm not the first, nor I won't be the last neether."

Alf was confirmed into the church, and persecuted for it by his mother, a few weeks before his brother's return home.

CHAPTER XXVI

MR. PIGOTT

ERNIE, bag in hand, and sore of heart, sauntered along to the end of Rectory Walk.

There Beech-hangar, swirling in the wind under the shoulder of the Downs that shut off Beau-nez, called to his wounded spirit.

He walked slowly along the New Road, away from the houses, across the Golf Links towards this favourite retreat of his boyhood where of old, when in trouble with his mother, he would retire.

There on the slope amid the beech-trees, the Links billowing away before him to the woods that ambushed the Duke's Lodge, he lay down. The smooth stems rose about him like columns in the choir of a church. The wind strayed amid a sea of sun-lit leaves. The cool, the comfort, the bright graciousness of these comrades of his youth soothed and satisfied him. He studied them with kind eyes. The harsh male quality of the oak was not theirs. They could not stand the buffeting of Time as did the fierce old warriors of the Weald; but they could sustain the spirit in the hour of need. They were for him the women among trees.

Ernie lay with his eyes shut, and his hands behind his head, listening to the wind flowing through the tree-tops. The murmur of flies, the under-song of birds, the moving stillness, the secret stir of life, filled him to overflowing.

Alf had made him feel an isolated atom, the sport of incredibly cruel devils. Now he knew that he was part of an immense and harmonious whole. The sense of dislocation, exile and disease passed away. His mind was an open cistern into which a myriad healing streams were pouring from an unknown source.

Who was Alf to disturb his peace of mind? Alf, the puny,

the pretentious, who was not really alive at all. There was something greater in the world than Alf, and that something was on his side. He was sure of it.

He sat up and laughed.

Then above the murmur of insects and birds the louder hum of Man and his machinery, setting the world to rights, stole in upon his mind.

Two groundmen were mowing the green just under the Hangar.

It was time to be moving.

He sauntered back along the New Road, eyeing the spruce villas on the northern side, where of old allotment gardens had been.

At the corner of Church Street he asked a policeman where Mr. Pigott lived now.

The man pointed down the Lewes Road, now fringed with houses.

The old schoolmaster had, it seemed, left Huntsman's Lodge at the foot of the Downs, and moved in nearer to his work when he became Manager of the South Downs Transport Co.

Ernie rambled down the dusty hill, the Downs upon his left, picking up familiar objects as he went — the Moot Farm standing up like an elm-girt island from the sea of arable, the long low backs of the Duke's piggeries, the path that wound across the plough and led over the hill to far Aldwoldston in the Ruther Valley.

A young woman with provocative eyes and brightly burnished hair came to the door at his knock and scanned him friendly.

"Is Mr. Pigott in?" Ernie asked.

"He's at his office."

"Could I see Mrs. Pigott then?"

She eyed him merrily.

"You are seeing her," she said; and added, enjoying his embarrassment, "I'm number two. My predecessor sleeps at the back." She tossed her bright head in the direction of the cemetery on Rodmill seen through the open back-door.

Ernie blushed and fumbled.

"I'm Ernie Caspar, Miss — I would say Ma'am."

The young woman regarded him with swift and sympathetic interest.

"Oh, I know *you*," she said. "You used to write from India. . . . So Mr. Pigott never mentioned *me*! I'll just speak to him when he comes in."

She saw the bag in his hand, and her mouth became firm.

"Been to see your people?"

"Just looked in on dad, 'm.'

She eyed him sharply.

"And your brother?"

Ern said nothing.

"Well then, you leave your bag here, and step across the Moot to the office. *Southdown Transport Co.*, back of the *Star* by the Quaker Meeting-house. You'll sleep the night here."

Ernie crossed the brickfields, passed his old school where the children were singing the evening hymn, under the church upon the Kneb, through what the old inhabitants still called Ox-steddle Bottom, where once his father had pointed out to him the remains of Roman byres.

The office was in Borough Lane.

Mrs. Pigott had warned her husband by telephone.

Ernie therefore was shown into the inner sanctum at once.

Mr. Pigott, grizzled now, but with the old almost aggressive air of integrity, summed his erstwhile pupil up with the eyes of the appraising schoolmaster.

"It's the old Ernie. I see that," he grunted. "So Alf's been playing it up already. You needn't tell me. He's a masterpiece, that young man. Even *she* admits that." He paused and began again, confidential and communicative like one naughty boy whispering to another. "What d'ye think of *her*? She's church — more shame to her. But I forgive her. I forgive her a lot. You have to when you're married to em — as you'll find some day. And what I don't forgive I pass by. For why? — If I didn't she'd sauce me." He suddenly became aware that he was being indiscreet, even undignified, and broke off gruffly — "Well, what did they teach you in the Army?"

Ernie laughed.

"It's not so bad as they make out, sir. I like the old Regiment well enough."

"They tell me," said Mr. Pigott solemnly, "that in South Africa none of the unpopular officers came home — *and they weren't shot by the Boers!*"

"It depends on the Regiment, I expect," replied Ernie. "There's not much of that in the Hammer-men. Our officers were mostly all right. More gentlemen than most, from what I could see of it. They were sports, and they tried to be just. Of course there wasn't none of em like dad — only the Colonel. Hadn't the education. But some of these snotty little jumped-ups like what they had in the Welsh Liverpools that lay alongside us in Pindi . . . Why I wouldn't salute em if I met em in the lines."

Mr. Pigott listened to this audacious statement with the hostile interest of the radical.

"A rotten system," he said. "Built on make-believe and lies."

"It fairly rots some of em," Ernie admitted. "Gives em more power nor what they can carry. But in the hands of the right men it don't work so bad. All depends on that."

Then Mr. Pigott asked him what he proposed to do.

"That's what I come to you about, sir."

"Of course your brother won't help!"

"No, sir; nor I wouldn't ask him," flashed Ernie.

"And I don't blame you," answered Mr. Pigott. "Alf's too busy taking the Mass and walking in processions to help his brother. . . . Now I'll tell you what to do. You go up and see Mr. Trupp. He can do anything he likes now he's disembowelled Royalty. And if he can't help you, I must; though I haven't got a vacant job in the yard just now. You're to sleep at my place, *she* says."

He followed Ernie to the door.

"What d'you make of your father?" he asked mysteriously.

"I don't rightly understand him, sir," Ernie answered.

"Don't you?" said Mr. Pigott. "I do." He dropped his voice. "He's waiting the Second Coming, I'm sure of it."

When Ernie presented himself at the Manor, Mr. Trupp

was out. Ernie thought Mrs. Trupp would see him. The smart maid thought not. Ernie, however, proved right.

Mrs. Trupp was sitting in the long drawing-room, with her daughter, and greeted him with pleasure.

"Ernie!" cried Mrs. Trupp. "This is a sight for sair e'en. What a man you've become!"

"Was Alfred decent to you?" blurted Bess.

Mrs. Trupp shot a warning glance at her impetuous daughter.

"And have you seen the new Mrs. Pigott?" she asked.

"She's top-hole," cried Bess. "He never stops talking about her. Really after that other old thing always sitting on his head ——"

Then Mr. Trupp entered, smiling, and cocking his face to sum up his visitor through his pince-nez.

"You needn't introduce yourself, Ernie," he growled. "You've taken no harm, I see."

Later the two men retired to the consulting-room to talk business.

"Would you care for a temporary job at the Hohenzollern?" asked Mr. Trupp; "the German Hotel on the Crumbles. It was building in your time. They want a lift-man, I know."

"Anything, sir," answered Ernie with easy enthusiasm.

Mr. Trupp rang up the Hotel and arranged the matter there and then.

"It will do as a stop-gap, anyway," he said, "until we can fix you up in a permanent job. You don't want to be knocking about at home, twiddling your thumbs."

"That I don't, sir!" laughed Ernie a thought ironically, and returned to Deep-dene to tell his luck.

Mr. Pigott glanced at his wife.

"The Hohenzollern," he said gruffly. "Well, give it a try."

Next day Mr. Pigott met the Doctor in the street.

"Well," he said, "what d'you think of your soldier?"

"Done him no harm anyway," replied Mr. Trupp, quite impenitent.

"I don't know," retorted the other. "He left here a gentleman: he comes back a labourer — fit to work a lift."

"None the worse for that," said Mr. Trupp. "Mr. Wyndham's been telling us we want fewer clerks and more working-men. There's no satisfying you radicals."

"Better than a jumped-up jackanapes in black leggings and a pilot coat, I will admit," answered the other. "Yes, you've got a lot to answer for, Mr. Trupp. First you send him off to the army; and directly that's finished you pack him off to the Hohenzollern Hotel."

"Might be worse places," muttered Mr. Trupp.

Mr. Pigott held up a hand in horror.

"Doctor!" he cried, "I tell you what it is. Ever since you saved that Tsar you've been a changed man."

"I don't know about that," said Mr. Trupp. "I only know that Tsars forget to pay their Doctor's bills."

"I'm glad to hear it," answered Mr. Pigott. "*Very* glad," with emphasis. "A lesson to you to leave the insides of Royalty to emselves in future."

BOOK IV
RUTH BOAM

CHAPTER XXVII

THE HOHENZOLLERN HOTEL

THE Hohenzollern Hotel was both physically and spiritually remote from all the other hotels in Beachbourne.

The respectable Grand, facing the Wish, the ponderous Talbot opposite the band-stand, the perky Hydropathic perched on the rise of the hill, the Dudley by the pier, the Cecil, the Bentinck, and all the other hotels with aristocratic names and a middle-class clientèle, were at the West-end of the town, interspersed among boarding-houses the whole length of the sea-front from the pier to Beau-nez.

The Hohenzollern stood aloof at the East-end on the edge of the Crumbles, as the Levels here were called.

An immense, modern caravanserai of pretentious neogothic style, it had been dumped down on the shore beyond the long-deserted Redoubt of Napoleonic times.

In front of it was the sea. On its flank, beyond the Fishing Station, stretched the marshes. Behind it, at a respectful distance, crouching in the dust, the mass of mean houses and crowded streets that constituted the East-end.

On these the Hohenzollern, aloof and lordly in its railed-off pleasure grounds, turned an unheeding back. It was unaware of their presence; or rather recognized them only to patronize.

It was a drab area, unfrequented by the fashionable and redolent of the atmosphere of cheap lodging-houses.

The parade ceased at the Redoubt, and ended for promenaders at the pier.

Beyond Splash Point nobody who was anybody ever thought it decent to penetrate. The band-stand, the winter gardens, the brick walls were at the West-end, reaching out towards Beau-nez.

And the Hohenzollern was not only inaccessible, it was self-contained and meant to be.

It possessed its own fine band, its own smooth lawns, its own strip of fore-shore with bathing rafts moored off it and bathing tents on the beach, its own tiny jetty for pleasure boats.

The hotel was German-owned and German-inspired; but it was not the centre of an extensive spy-system as certain of the patriots of East Sussex maintained.

The men and women who launched it as a business proposition were not mad. They were just cosmopolitan financiers who knew a good deal about the human heart on its shady side, and proposed to make money out of their knowledge.

In Beachbourne it was always spoken of as the German Hotel, and its character was well known and probably exaggerated.

The town, called by spiteful rivals on the South Coast Churchy Beachbourne, by reason of the number and variety of its sacred edifices, was shocked and delighted.

Started in the late nineties, the original title of the Hotel was of course the Empire; and its first chairman, Baron Blumenthal, a prominent member of the Primrose League. Then came the slump in British Imperialism after the Boer War. With the advent of a Radical Government it became correct for desperate patriots to affirm with immense emphasis in private, and with less emphasis on public platforms that they would sooner see the country governed by the German Emperor, who was at least a gentleman, than by Lloyd George — that little Welsh attorney.

At the height of this patriotic rally the German Emperor came himself to England; and Beachbourne was thrilled to hear the great and good man was to stop at the Empire Hotel to be under Mr. Trupp.

The Hotel incontinently changed its name to commemorate an event which in fact never took place. Shortly afterwards, however, a Balkan Tsar — also a Hohenzollern — happily did come, and was subjected by Mr. Trupp to the operation prepared for the head of his family.

But if the Hotel changed its name, its reputation remained the same and even grew. In Berlin, Paris, Brussels, Buda-

Pesth, men talked of it; and even in India native princes whispered *risqué* stories about it to their Prime Ministers at the Council Table.

Wherever men spoke of it, they mentioned with smiles its two characteristic traits — the Third Floor and the Head Porter.

The Hohenzollern Hotel, indeed, had two sides, like many a better institution, and deliberately cultivated both.

The Third Floor represented one; and Salvation Joe the other.

There were respectable men and women who stayed regularly at the Hotel on the Crumbles, and denied quite honestly and not without heat all knowledge of the Third Floor and what it stood for. It was a convention at the Hohenzollern that nobody stopping there ever recognized anybody else. You went down to Beachbourne from town with the man who always occupied the chair next you at the club; you sat by his side in the station-bus that bore you to the portals of the Hotel; and then — you parted till Monday morning when you met once more on the platform at the station. Therefore the most staid and admirable of citizens often retired there to be undisturbed. Ministers and their secretaries during a busy Session, homely young couples on their honeymoons, even Bishops and clergymen in retreat. And for these the Hotel had its undoubted advantages. Eastwards the Levels stretched away for miles haunted by none but birds. The fore-shore was private, the sea itself secluded. There were no trippers, and, what mattered more, none of the usual Society week-enders. The former spread themselves between the Redoubt and the pier, the latter from the pier to Beau-nez.

It was for those who sought for quiet at the Hotel that the Head Porter existed. He was known far and wide as Salvation Joe, and always wore the red jersey of his kind by request of the Management; though unkind rumour affirmed that he had forfeited the right to his distinguishing habit.

On Sundays, after lunch, the second dining-room was cleared, and Salvation Joe, all glorious in scarlet apparel, held a meeting for the staff. Visitors would be welcomed, a notice in the hall announced, though as Joe often said with

the splendid smile he was alleged to have copied from a recent Archbishop,

"It's only just among ourselves, sir. We call it our 'appy 'our. We just like to meet together the once a week — them and me and the Master."

That pleased the Bishops, who went back to the Athenæum and talked about it over their coffee; it delighted the occupants of the Third Floor, especially on wet Sundays; and, to judge from the attendance, it appeared to be very popular with the staff, who, warmed by the rays from Joe's benevolent eye, sang with enthusiasm *Tell me the old, old story* and the like.

Moreover it was noticed by the curious that when the men were asked by sceptical visitors whether they *really* enjoyed it, the invariable answer given in the same sort of voice with the same sort of smile was,

"We calls it our 'appy 'our, miss."

Salvation Joe was not perhaps more of a humbug than most of us: that is to say, he humbugged himself just as much as he humbugged others. At one time he had quite certainly found religion; and if with the advent of middle age he lost it, it is by no means sure that he was aware of his loss.

Certainly he was invaluable to the Management as a counterpoise; and they paid him accordingly. Salvation Joe never took tips. That impressed every one, especially the Third Floor. Through this idiosyncrasy Joe indeed acquired a European reputation. On Monday mornings he stood in the great marbled hall, under a tall palm, among bustling porters and stacks of luggage, a majestic presence, refusing with a martyr's smile the coin that corrupts. His real name was Joseph Collett; and in the boot-room in the basement he was known irreverently as J. C.

The staff attended the service because it paid; and they had to live.

There was only one man who never went; and that man was Ernie.

Joe met him in the passage one day, after he had been at the Hotel a month or more, and stopped him.

"I suppose you haven't got a soul to save then, Caspar?"

he began, his great chest rising and falling beneath the flaming jersey.

Ernie grinned sheepishly.

"Well, Mr. Collett, as to that, I guess I've got the same as most."

"But you're too proud to save it," continued the other in a voice like battalions on the march. He laid a frank and friendly hand on Ernie's shoulder. "Come and confess your Redeemer, my lad!" he called. "Come to the foot of the Cross! Throw the burden of your sins on Him! He'll carry em — next Sunday — two o'clock — second dining-room — sharp."

Ernie never went.

It was not that he wished to stand or fall by a principle: Ernie had no hankerings for a martyr's crown. It may have been that he inherited from his father a fine reserve in matters spiritual and that somewhere in the deeps of him there was an invincible repugnance to the methods of the seducer, or merely that he was one of the simple of earth — far too honest to see the path of expediency and follow it.

The other men saw and winked. They did not admire Ernie for refusing to bow the knee, nor was there anything to admire.

"Bloody mug," was all their comment.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE THIRD FLOOR

BUT if Ernie was simple, he was not blind.

When he was not on the lift, he acted as Boots for the Third Floor; and no man could work there without seeing what he saw.

Mr. Pigott, once meeting his old pupil in Church Street, asked him how he liked his job.

"Not so bad, sir," Ernie answered without enthusiasm. "Some I likes; and some I dislikes; and most I don't mind."

The work indeed, in the slack seasons at all events, was by no means hard, the wages moderate; the tips many, and sometimes extravagant.

Ernie was the only man on the staff who frequented the Third Floor. No waiters ever came there. All the waiting that was done — and there was plenty — was done by the maids.

Most of these were foreign; and the few who were not had adopted foreign names. They were pretty and pert; and they called Ernie —"Ernie Boots." It was the common gossip that the Manageress chose them herself —"with care," the knowing added with a wink.

Madame, as she was familiarly known, was in fact a Bavarian, who must have been beautiful in her day, with an immense bust that concealed a most kind heart, and piles of fair hair, obviously her own, that she amassed in pyramids on the top of her head. There was generally a cigarette between her lips, and she used a lorgnette lavishly. She was in fact an efficient woman of the world, saved from the dreadful vices of the efficient by a genuinely benignant nature. And she avowed openly that it was her mission in life to give people what they wanted — propriety to the proper, and pleasure to the pleasure-seeking.

Ernie had been at the hotel nearly a year when there came to the Third Floor a maid who seemed strangely out of her element.

He noted her advent at once with surprise and a sense of shame. Amid her saucy colleagues she seemed a lily of the valley blowing stately amid artificial flowers. A big young woman and beautiful, she held herself apart, moving among the others, apparently unconscious of them, and ignorant of the meretricious atmosphere, as a Madonna walking through the ballet of a music-hall revue.

Her presence filled him with acute personal discomfort. He did not like the tone of the Third Floor, but he accepted it as he accepted everything with the easy tolerance that was his weakness. This majestic young woman with her aloof and noble air, her accusing innocence, her damning purity, filled him with shame and pity — shame for himself and his weak-kneed benevolence, pity for those others whom she with her unconscious dignity made appear so small and vulgar.

Her name was Ruth, so much Ernie knew, and she was English too, though she scarcely looked it: for she was very dark, her hair black as a horse's mane, with a skin that had a peculiar ruddy warmth, and the large brown eyes full of splendid darkness and mellow lights, that are so rare and therefore so noticeable when found among the working-classes that fringe the North Sea. Her brows, black as her hair and broadly splashed, almost met; but there was nothing of ferocity about her.

Her natural habit, Ernie saw, was that of a great and mysteriously growing tree, its roots deep in the red earth; its massive foliage drinking of the goodness of sunshine and wind and rain; but now there was about her a note of restraint, even of stress. The easy flow of her nature was being dammed. She seemed out of place and dumbly aware of it, like a creature of the wilderness in a strange environment. The profound and quiet joyousness of woman, maturing to ripe perfection, which should have been hers to an unusual degree, was not.

Ernie was desperately shy of her.

He would peep at her as she passed him on her swift way; she never looked at him.

He seldom saw her speak to the other maids. Yet it was clear to him that this isolation was unnatural to her, and that she was made for quiet intercourse and noble mirth. Unlike the other maids she was always busy. She never romped, gossiped, or flirted.

One evening Ernie saw a fat-necked Jew in a sleeping suit, his mouth stuffed with a cigar, his eyes hot and bibulous, standing in the door of his bedroom.

The dark beauty came by.

The Jew chirped at her.

"Pretty tartie!" he called in his luscious voice. "Come inside then. I've got something to show you."

The girl passed on, unheeding.

The Jew followed her with moist eyes that glistened.

A fair chamber-maid emerging from another room winked at Ernie.

"She's white," she said, and jerked her head in the direction of the disappearing girl.

The chamber-maid was a little cockney from Clapham who had taken to herself the name of Céleste.

"None the worse for that, I dare say," said Ernie with unusual acrimony.

Céleste flirted on her way.

"Tra-la-la! — ta-ta-ta!" she taunted with a little mocking flutter of her fingers. "I suppose you're white too, Ernie Boots."

"No," grinned Ernie. "I'm grey."

"Baa-baa, black sheep!" mocked the naughty one. "I'd be one or the other. Grey's a silly sort of tint."

Then the Jew's sodden voice came wheezing down the corridor.

"Here, kid! — You'll do. You're not a bloody iceberg, are you?"

Céleste shook her carefully-coiffed head.

"I'm engaged, Soly. So sorry! — Go back to bed, there's a dear old thing!"

Ernie woke that night in the belief that Ruth was bending over him.

"Ruth!" he answered quietly. "Is that you?" But there was no reply.

Next morning he took the plunge.

"Good morning, Miss," he said as she passed him.

The other's curiously impassive face flashed into life.

"Good morning, Mr. Boots," she answered in a deep and humming voice like the sound of wings.

She said the words quite simply, and he saw she was not chaffing. She honestly believed Boots to be his name.

Céleste, dusting in an adjoining room, looked through an open door.

"She's an innocent," she said discontentedly. "She knows nothing. Ought to go back to her mother. Madame's got no business to put her here."

Ernie went on his way, that deep voice still thrilling in his ears.

Thereafter he sought and found chances of serving the girl.

One day he came on her tugging a heavy basket of washing along the passage. It was clear that she had been too proud to ask another maid for help, preferring to trust her own magnificent physique to accomplish the task alone.

"Let me, Miss," he said.

"You take yon end," she answered. "I'll take this. Then atween us like."

"Ah," said Ernie, gathering courage. "I see what it is. You think you're the only strong one." Deliberately and without an effort he swung the basket on to his shoulder and bore it jauntily to its destination.

Then he slid it down and faced the girl.

"Now then!" he cried.

She dropped her eyelids, and he saw the length and curl of her lashes.

"You *are* strong," she said, with a dainty irony he found as delightful as it was surprising. "I allow you'll be purty nigh half as strong as I be."

He pointed an accusing finger at her.

"You're Sussex!" he cried, falling into the old broad speech in his turn. "I'd knaw ye anywheres."

Her whole face gladdened slowly as she heard the familiar accent.

"Never!" she said, still faintly ironical, and added more

sedately. "I was bred and born in Sussex, and never been outside it."

"And never mean to be," chaffed Ernie. "That's your style. I knaw ye."

"I was borrn in the Brooks at Aldwoldston," she continued, pronouncing the word Auston. "Along under the church by the White Bridge across Parson's Tye. Dad was Squire Caryll's keeper till he was ate up with the rheumatism." Her speech broadened even as she spoke, deliberately, he thought, to meet his own.

He followed suit.

The pair began to ca-a-a away at each other like a couple of old rooks in an elm in May.

"What might be your name then?"

"Ruth Boam, I believe."

Ernie nodded sagaciously.

"'Twould be surely. Boam or Burgess or Ticehurst or Woolgar. Something with a bit o Saxon in it, as dad says." He added hopefully: "I'm Sussex too. I was dragged up in Old Town agin the Rectory there," jerking his head. "Cerdainly I was."

She regarded him mischievously.

"I knew you was no'hun of a foreigner then," she told him.

Ernie feigned surprise.

"How did you knaw that then?"

She chuckled like a cuckoo.

"Hap I aren't the only one," she answered.

Then she was gone; and it struck him suddenly that this grave and stately damsel had been chaffing him.

Ernie stood a moment amazed. Then he nodded his head.

Suddenly he seemed to have crossed a border-line into a new country. Behind him was the stale old past, with its failures, its purposelessness, its dreary hag-tracks; before him was adventure, the New world — and what?

He wasn't sure. But there it was beckoning him and he should follow, true child of Romance that he was.

And it was time he moved on.

He had been a year now at the Hotel and was, as always, tending to grow slack.

Salvation Joe was watching him, waiting his chance, and Ernie knew it.

Now a change stole over him. A nucleus, small at first, but always growing, round which the dissipated forces of his spirit could rally, had been forming in his heart, unknown to him, ever since Ruth's advent to the Third Floor. He was becoming firm of purpose, gathering himself, making good. His eyes, his face, his gait, testified to the change.

Mr. Trupp, the observant, remarked on it to Mr. Pigott.

"He's growing," he said.

"The right way, let's hope," answered the other. "That place you sent him to is a queer kind of forcing house."

"He wants forcing," said Mr. Trupp. "We all do."

"Bah!" growled Mr. Pigott. "You and your Lash."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE MAN OF AFFAIRS

ONCE a week Ernie had a half-day off, which he invariably spent in the same way.

He took the bus from the Redoubt up to Old Town, went home, and coaxed his father out for a walk to Beech-hangar or the Downs above the chalk-pit. Then back to tea, and a long and quiet smoke in the study.

In this matter he always had a faint resistance to overcome, part real, part simulated: his father's excuse for not going being the curious one that he was too busy.

"You forget that I'm a man of action now," he would say, the imp dancing remotely in his blue eyes. "I've an official position."

It was true too in a sense. Edward Caspar, during Ernie's absence in India, had been appointed a visitor to the workhouse at the back of Rectory Walk. And there in that cess-pool of our civilization, into which filtered drop by drop the sewage of all our defective social processes, amid the derelicts of the vast ocean of Empire, prostitutes sickening to death, the idiot offspring of incestuous intercourse, the half-witted mother who had fallen a prey to the prowling male, the decent girl who had succumbed to her own affections, the young man broken in the industrial arena, the middle-aged who were not wanted, the old for whom there was no place beside the fire at home, amid all those of every age and class whom Society was too cruel to kill, and not capable as yet of stimulating to life, Edward Caspar wandered vaguely like a cloud, full of sunshine, blessing alike and blessed.

In his old-fashioned roomy tail-coat of a country gentleman, always fresh, his beautiful linen, that showed Anne Caspar's care, his blue tie of an artist running loosely

through a gold ring, he became a familiar figure in the wards of the Bastille, with his beard, his spectacles, his morning air, radiating a mild warmth of love and pity.

Almost daily he might be seen, sitting at the bedside of some broken boy picked up off the roads to be patched up and flung again under the wheels of the Juggernaut car of modern Industrialism that had crushed him, or listening to the tale of some ancient in corduroys — not seldom according to his own account the scion of an illustrious but ruined house — who had laboured on the land for sixty years, to be cast alive into the cess-pool when he had been broken in the service of his country.

All the inmates of the Bastille, from the unwanted babies in the nursery, to the grannies and daddies propped up like dreadful dolls in bed in the wards of the Infirmary, liked the visits of this shambling man who said so little and looked so much.

The Lady Augusta Willcocks, a fierce and efficient Guardian, tramping the wards in short skirts, broad-toed boots, and cropped woolly white hair, cross-questioned the Master as to what Mr. Caspar said to the inmates.

The Master, a kind man, something of a mystic himself, answered:

"He don't seem to say much. Mostly he listens."

"Oh, that's all right," said the lady with relief. "Only we don't want a lot of nonsense talked in here."

"Seems to soothe em," continued the Master. "Afore now when I've had them violent in the casuals' cells I've sent for him. They call him the Prophet."

The Master smiled to himself as the masterful lady tramped on her way.

He had noticed that Edward Caspar invariably left the ward when the Reverend Spink entered to hold Divine Service; and that if the Archdeacon marched through the wards like a conqueror amid the dreadful human débris of a battle-field the visitor, sitting quietly at the bedside of some cast-away, never seemed to see him.

In spite of the pressure of affairs, Ernie rarely failed to lure his father out into the sunshine on the hill.

Once, as they sat together by the roadside in Beech-hangar, Ernie propounded a solemn question.

"Dad."

"Well."

"Didn't you once say there was a Spanish strain in the real old Sussex peasant stock?"

The father eyed his son obliquely.

"So they say," he answered. "A Spanish galleon in the days of the Armada wrecked in Ruther Haven. That's the story. And I'm inclined to think there's something in it. Any way there's more foreign blood in the genuine peasantry of Sussex and Kent than in all the rest of England. Propinquity to the Continent, you see. All the refugees came here first — Dutchmen in the days of Alva; Huguenots after the Revocation; Royalists during the Terror; and smugglers of all sorts all the time from the days of Cæsar."

That evening, as Anne Caspar brushed her hair in the bedroom before going to bed, she heard her husband in the little dressing-room talking to himself as his manner was.

She stayed the sweeping motion of her hand and listened.

"I met Mr. Pigott in Church Street this evening," she called. "He stopped me and said, 'What's come to Ernie?'"

There was a silence; then the voice from next door answered,

"She's dark. That's all I know."

CHAPTER XXX

REALITY

A FEW days after his conversation with his father, Ernie took a telegram up to the Third Floor in the afternoon, and was about to descend when he heard a bedroom bell ring violently for the maid on duty.

There was no maid visible.

He went along the corridor. At the end of it was a passage-landing with a window looking over the sea.

On the window-sill Ruth was sitting in the sun, perched as a woman riding, her work beside her.

She did not see him, and for a moment he watched her fascinated: the lines of her figure, almost majestic for so young a woman; the dignity of her face; the lovely curve of her neck and shoulders; the warmth of her colouring. Her thimbled finger flashed to and fro; and the sun caught her hair, simply massed beneath her cap, and revealing in its blackness just a note of tan.

Every now and then, as the sea thumped and hissed and poured on the fore-shore, she looked up.

There was for once a wonderful content upon her face, the look that Ernie had often sought and never found there before. The strain had vanished. This girl possessed her soul in love and peace for the moment at least.

Ernie was reluctant to disturb her, for she gave him the impression of one who prays.

"The bell's going, Ruth," he said at last gently.

She put down her work and dismounted from the sill in that swift business-like way of hers. There was a rhythm about her every movement that satisfied the deepest need of Ernie's soul.

"What number?" she asked.

"Seventy-seven."

Her face clouded.

It was the sodden Jew, clamant once more.

"I'll go," said Ernie.

It was no job of his, but go he did. And he was glad he had, for Soly surpassed himself.

"You!" stertorously. "What good are you to me? Send that Spanish gypsy here! She's the one I want. I like 'em brown."

Just outside the door Ernie met Céleste.

"He wants you, Miss," he said, and admired the readiness of his lie.

Then he walked thoughtfully back to Ruth, who had resumed her work.

"It's all right," he said shyly.

She lifted her face to him slowly, almost stealthily.

Then there flashed a lovely light into her eyes.

"Thank-you, Mr. Boots," she said.

He advanced a step on her.

"That ain't my name."

She hid again in her work.

"What is then?" she asked.

"Ernie," he said. "Call me that."

He was curiously peremptory, almost imperious.

She did not answer him — threading her needle deliberately against the light.

Suddenly doors flung wide, and his whole being leapt forth as from a furnace, caught her up, and rapt her in a living flame of love.

She seemed to feel it beating about her, devouring her, and stirred as a tired bird stirs in its nest at night after a long flight.

Ernie was trembling till it seemed to him that his heels rat-a-tatting on the floor must betray him.

Then he went on his way.

The transfiguring experience that comes perhaps once in a life-time to the pure in heart had come to him in full flood. A new life was his, sweeping away old land-marks, and bearing him he knew not whither. He drifted with that mighty tide, content to be borne along. He had been alive for twenty-five years, yet dead. Now he rose from the tomb, at this his astounding Ascension-tide. In a second he had

been rapt up from the earth, had suffered miraculous conversion, and would never again see life as he had once seen it.

It was curious, wonderful, and above all it revolutionized old values.

The men and women he met in the passage looked different, especially the women.

They were coarse, commonplace.

Céleste passed him with a quip.

What she said he didn't know, but he thought how opaque and material she was in such a spiritual world; and what a pity it was; and how sorry he was for her.

Madame stopped him and gave him orders. He heard and carried them out.

But all the while this new spirit was at work on its own business in the deeps of him. His intellect, a mere cockle-shell afloat on an Ocean of Mind, dealt with the superficial mechanism of life.

He was elsewhere. For the first time Ernie became aware of a Double Life going on within him, of Two Minds, related, yet apart, each pursuing its own ends.

He entered the room in the basement where the men cleaned the knives, blacked the boots and ate their hurried meals. It was cool, almost cavernous. He was amazed that he had never before seen beauty in this bleak room, the beauty of the woods for which he longed.

He sat down and was glad.

About him were men of all nationalities, some in aprons, some in their shirt-sleeves, some snatching a desultory snack, chattering or silent.

Ernie, aware of them, yet deep in himself, was conscious of two impressions: These men were monkeys — and knew it; and they were Sons of God — and as yet unconscious of it.

One of the men, a sallow Austrian with a stringy moustache, who went by the name of Don John among his mates, put down the *Arbeiter Zeitung* which he had been reading, watched Ernie awhile sardonically, and then made a jeering remark to a neighbour, who replied.

Ernie caught the words "Third Floor."

Instantly he emerged from his deeps, his intellect alert, paramount, and defensive.

Don John continued caressingly, his cheek bulging with cheese, and a clasp-knife in his hand.

"Pluddy mug!" he jeered. "Thinks they're for him. They're for de toffs on de top — not for *you*! You're unter-tog. Nozzing for unter-tog in this world only de crumbs that *don't* fall from de rich man's table. De girls are for de Chairman Jews. They can buy em. Can you? — Nice English girls are cheap."

CHAPTER XXXI

THE RIDE ON THE BUS

THE Thursday following his great experience, Ernie went as usual to the Redoubt which was the terminus of the bus that ran to Billing's Corner.

He was early; and there was as yet only one passenger on the roof, a young woman simply dressed in black, her bare throat girt about with yellow amber, and wearing a felt hat of terra-cotta colour.

She was sitting on the front seat.

The large and graceful indolence of her pose gave him pause.

He stayed on the last step, regarding her.

Then she turned her face sea-wards and he saw her profile.

Another moment and he stood above her.

"Ruth," he said.

She looked up at him.

"O, it's you, Ernie!" she answered quite simply, and without a thought of coquetry.

His heart moved within him.

"That's a little better!" he muttered, and proceeded to sit down beside her.

She made room for him, friendly and entirely unconscious.

They began to talk, and once she glanced at him from under her hat with tranquil eyes that seemed to pour their soft light into his.

He held them with his own.

The two streams met and mingled in mysterious communion that thrilled him till he trembled faintly.

He was the first to turn away.

"You look just all right," he said.

She was a changed girl. The restraint had left her. A new life danced within her. She was quivering with it, almost communicative.

"I feel it," she answered joyously. "I'm off till ten. I'm going away back home to Dad and Mother. I most in general doos o Sadadays if I gets off."

She was broadening her speech again, as though to throw off the corrupting town, and draw near once more to the country which had bred her.

He heard her with delight; and answered her easily and in kind.

"Auston, aren't it?" he asked.

She eyed him slyly, taking his humour, and nodded.

"You got it," she said. "I just take bus to Billing's Corner; and then Lewes coach drops me at Turnpike short o B'rick. Then 'dis but little better'n a mile to traipse down the valley. I was borrun in the River House in the Brooks along o the White Bridge under the church. And where I was borrun there my folks do still live. Pretty well beknown in them paarts my folks be, I rack'n." She was almost chattering now. And as her tongue resumed with joy the habit of babyhood a ripple of deep mirth swam over her face, and spoke of profound inward content.

She became shy and confidential. "Just under the eaves outside the room where I was borrun there's a martin's nest. And in the dark o summer nights they wake and gurgle to emselves. That'll be the little uns snugglin agin their mother's breast and thinkin how cosy. I do just adore to listen to em. Kind o company like." She gurgled in her turn, and then looked away abashed and blushing at the flow of her confidences.

"That's where you was borrun, was it?" mocked Ernie. "No, it warn't then. You was borrun in de corrun one morrun all forlorrun. How do I know it? Cos you're same as I be. You're a country chap."

It was clear that she enjoyed his chaff.

"That's a sure thing, you may depend," she answered in that humming voice of hers that seemed to resound long after she had finished speaking. "It's bred in my blood. See dad's dad and his dad afoor him dey were ox-herds in

the home-farm in Ruther Valley. Dad went along o the long-horns on the hill too when he was a lad. There's few teams left now except only Mr. Gorringe's at Exeat. When dad's dad was a lad it was pretty near ox-teams allwheres in Sussex — on the hill and on the Levels. Then it come horrses; and prazendly it'll be machines. The world moves faster nor it used to did one time o day, I expagd. Ya-as. Cerdainly it doos."

The bus ran along the Esplanade to the pier, the sea shining on their left. Then it swung down Cornfield Road, stopped at the Station, and took the Old Road for Lewes. As it lurched under the Chestnuts into Water Lane, the Downs were seen across Saffrons Croft through a screen of elms.

"There they be!" cried Ernie, hailing them. "What d'you think of them now?"

"Eh, but they're like mother and father to you, if you've been bred to em," answered Ruth. "I just couldn't a-bear to be parted from them nohows. They're Sussex — them and the sea. Sussex by the sea, my Miss Caryll used to call it."

They travelled up the hill; and the girl feasted her eyes on the green of Saffrons Croft.

"I allow the brown-birds holloa in them old ellums, dawn and dusk," she murmured, talking more to herself than to her companion. "That's what I misses by the sea more'n all — the song o birds. There's no loo like for em — only the anonymous bushes. Reck'n that's where it is. They like the loo'th, doos birds. But times I see a old jack-yearn flappin along over the Levels like he'd all the time before him. And the wheat-ears come from acrarst the sea and show the white of their tails that carmical about Cuckoo-fair. Hap it'll be their first landing-place. They must be tired. But there's not nigh the numbers there was one time o day. When dad was a lad there was I dunna many all along the Downs from Rottingdean to Friston."

The bus stopped, as always, at the *Star*.

Ernie, who felt the spirit of the show-man strong within him, pointed out the Manor-house with a certain proprietary air.

"That's where Mr. Trupp lives," he explained. "They come from all over the world to see him. He's our doctor. Has been this thirty year. Dad was one of the first in Old Town to have him. Give him his start, as you might say."

"He's a nice gentleman surely," said Ruth.

"Do you know him then?" asked Ernie, a thought jealously.

"I've knaw'd him all my life," answered the other. "He attends the Squire and family. He looked after my Miss Caryll till she died; and then me when I took bad after her death. Eh, but he was a kind gentleman."

"He brought me into the world," said Ernie with an air of finality, the desire to swagger still strong upon him. "He took the inside out of the Tsar of Dobrudja and he brought me into the world. That's what Mr. Trupp done."

She turned a deep brown eye on him.

"He done well," she said quietly.

Then they both laughed.

At Billing's Corner he helped her off the bus and on to the four-horse char-a-banc waiting outside the *Billing Arms*.

"Last char-a-banc home," said Ernie authoritatively. "Half after nine or so. I'll look out."

He stood beneath her in the dust.

With her jet-black hair, her colouring of a ripe peach, and those soft swarthy eyes that streamed down upon him, she perched above him, stately, mocking, mysterious.

He could not make her out. She was at once so simple and so elusive in her royal way. She teased, startled, and exalted him; she calmed and maddened him.

"Thank you, Mr. Caspar," came the quiet voice from on high.

"Call me, Ernie," he ordered, this strange passion to domineer still overmastering him.

She gazed at him with those quiet ironical eyes of hers.

Then the char-a-banc moved on.

CHAPTER XXXII

ON THE HILL

THAT afternoon Ernie and his father sauntered up to the chalk-pit, and lay on the green hill-side above it in the sun.

Ernie plucked the bents and chewed them.

"Dad," he began at last.

"Yes."

"What is love?"

Once years ago at a dance in Grosvenor Square, Edward Caspar had himself for a moment floated out on to the ocean of an immense and wonderful new life. Thereafter he had been captured, as such easy-going dreamy creatures are, by one of the fiercer sex. He respected his wife, admired her beauty, owed her much, and was aware of it; but for all her strength of character Anne had found herself from the start of her married relations with her husband in that position of secret moral inferiority which is even to-day, perhaps as the result of an age-long inheritance of tradition, the accustomed doom of the woman who has taken the initiative in matters of sex. Moreover as the years went by the doom grew always more oppressive, and her husband more remote. . . .

Edward answered his son,

"A door opens," he said slowly. "And you see."

"What d'you see?" persisted the young man.

His father made a curious undulating motion with his hand.

"The Infinite that lends
A Yonder to all ends,"

he said after a pause, and gestured across the Weald stretched beneath them.

"I can see it," he mused, "and hear it. So can you. It's a Tide — like the wind in willow leaves. It's silvery and

it rustles. It's there — and here — and everywhere. The scientists call it ether. So it is — from their point of view. If you approach it from the other side — our side — it's what you said. It goes like so — like a billow." With fine long-fingered hand he resumed that curious rhythmic motion of his. "I once heard somebody compare Humanity to an Undulating Wave. So it is, because it's the highest expression of *That*. It made us, and is us. All that about the Everlasting Arms which Mr. Pigott, and the Archdeacon, and your Salvation Joe talk about, it's all true — literally true. Only they put it crudely; and for most of them it's an opinion and not a fact of experience — that a man can prove for himself at any moment." He paused. "Love is Recognition — often instantaneous. It is the I-within recognizes the Me-without."

He was sitting up now, bare-headed. A lovely colour flushed his frail complexion. To Ernie, watching his scant hair, he seemed wonderfully innocent and pure: a child talking with the wisdom of an old man.

Then his father spoke again with an emphasis that was almost startling.

"It's the profound simplicity of life that baffles us," he said. "It's too simple for us to understand. Our brains aren't big enough — as yet." He was becoming strangely excited. Ernie thought he understood now the source of that exalted look of his father's. "But we shall some day. Already there has been One Man who did. Think of it! We crucified Him for it of course. We had to. He was climbing too far a-head: so we plucked him back to earth. You *mustn't* go too far ahead of the Herd. They won't stand it. But He knew: He trusted It: He could float in It — like that kittiwake, ascending into heaven, descending into hell, at will."

He lay back on the turf, exhausted, his hat over his eyes, his hands on the turf beside him.

"Ernie."

"Yes, dad."

"Have you felt the Tide?"

"I think so."

The old man put his hand upon his son's.

"Let it come, Boy-lad," he said. "Trust it to do the work. All our mistakes are due to the same thing."

"What's that?" asked Ernie.

"Trying to interfere," answered the other. "*Follow!*—that's our human part."

That evening, after supper, before he left, Ernie asked his mother shyly for some roses. She took him out into the front-garden, tiny as it was trim, and gave him of her best.

Afterwards, as he walked away, she stood at the little gate and watched him, a beautiful look in her eyes. Then she wiped her shoes very carefully, and turned into the house.

The study-door was open, and she peeped in.

Her husband was sitting as always in the bow, looking out towards the trees stirring in the Rectory garden.

Anne stared at him.

"Has he said anything to you?" she asked at last in the voice that grew always more grumbling and ungracious with the years.

"Not yet," her husband answered.

"Well, it's about time," Anne grumbled. "Only I wish I'd had the choosing of her."

"Ernie'll choose all right," Edward answered in the peculiar crisp way he sometimes now adopted. "You needn't worry about *him*."

Whether there was a faint emphasis on the pronoun or not, Anne answered with asperity,

"And you needn't worry about Alf for that matter. He's far too set on himself to find room for a wife."

Ernie was at Billing's Corner half an hour before the Lewes char-a-banc was due, hanging about at the top of the rise, looking along the white road that runs past Moot Farm under the long swell of the escorting hills.

It was a perfect evening of late May. The sun had already sunk in darkened majesty against the West when the familiar cloud of dust betokened the approach of the four-horse team.

Ruth was sitting on the box beside the driver. Ernie recognized her from afar by the splotch of colour made by

her hat, and was filled with an almost overpowering content.

The horses sprang the rise at a canter, the conductor blowing a flourish on his horn. The girl's hand was to her hat, and her head bowed to the wind. The char-a-banc drew up with a swagger in the open space before the *Billing Arms*.

She was smiling down at him.

Ernie lifted his cap: it was a trick he had from his father. No one had ever paid the girl that common courtesy before, and she beamed upon him.

The other passengers were descending by the steps.

Ernie advanced lordly.

"This way!" he ordered, and laid his roses on the driver's foot-board. "Don't wait for them! Put your foot on the wheel! Give over your hand! Now your left foot here!"

For the first time in his life he felt masterful. Powers in him, of which he had possessed no previous knowledge, were thrusting through the ice of the customary.

Ruth obeyed.

She slipped her foot into his hand. It was slight, not small, yet beautifully compact.

"It's dusty," she warned him.

"No, it ain't," he answered, still in his high mood.

He gripped it firmly. Her cool hand was in his.

Then she trusted her whole weight to him.

He felt his strength tried and answering to the test; and rejoiced in it. So did she.

For a moment he balanced her, lifted her even, let her feel the power of his manhood. Then he lowered her swiftly.

It was well, even gracefully done.

Neither spoke; Ernie took his roses from the feet of the driver, who looked down with approval.

"Go on!" he said sturdily. "That's the way!"

The motor-bus that was to take them back to the hotel was turning in the open space before the public-house.

Without a word they climbed on to the top.

The bus dropped down Church Street, past the long-backed church with its square tower standing on the grave-strewn mound solemn in the growing dusk.

Ernie placed his roses in Ruth's lap.

Her eyes were shining, her voice soft.

"For me?" she asked in her deep thrilling voice.

For a second he laid his hand on hers.

"Oh, they are beauties!" She buried her face in them. "My Miss Caryll learned me the names of a tidy few o them when we was in the Dower-house afoor she come to Beachbourne," she said.

A motor-car stood at Mr. Trupp's door as the bus reached the *Star*.

The two talked quietly of the famous surgeon, their heads together.

The chauffeur got down from the Doctor's car and crossed slowly towards the bus.

He was small and wore black gaiters that glittered in the lamp-light like a wet slug.

He stood beneath them in the road, and then gave a low whistle.

Ernie looked down.

Alf was leering up at him.

CHAPTER XXXIII

UNDER THE STARS

THE bus rolled on, past Saffrons Croft, the stars now twittering in the branches of the elms.

"Who was that?" asked Ruth.

"My brother," answered Ernie, a thought surlily.

"He doesn't favour you," said Ruth after a pause.

"No," answered Ernie. "He's a master-man now, Alf is. Got his own garage and men working for him and all. He drives for Mr. Trupp."

At the pier, at Ernie's suggestion, they got down. It was dark now; the sea moon-silvered and still.

They walked along, rubbing elbows. Ernie broke the silence, to ask a question that had long haunted him.

"Ruth," he said, "however did you come into service at the Hohenzollern?"

Both of them had unconsciously resumed the accent of the town as they returned to the town.

Ruth told him simply and without reserve.

She had been maid to Squire Caryll's sister at the Dower-house in Aldwoldston. Her mistress had been taken ill, and Mr. Trupp had ordered her to Beachbourne.

"We was going to the Grand," Ruth told him. "But it was full. So cardingly we went to the Hohenzollern till the Grand could have us. And once there we stayed there two years — till she died. See Mr. Trupp likes the Hotel for his patients. There's the lawns straight onto the sea; and the Invalids' Corner by the anonymous hedge he got Madame to build."

Madame had throughout been kind, so kind — first to her mistress and then to her; for after Miss Caryll's death Ruth had broken down from over-strain. The Manageress and Mr. Trupp had pulled her through. Then when she came round, Madame, who was clearly fond of the girl, had kept her on as personal maid, "cosseting me," said Ruth with a

little laugh, "like a bottle-lamb." At Easter, when the crush came, and Ruth was quite recovered, Madame had asked her to go to the Third Floor to help, saying she would take her back if the girl didn't like it.

"I went tempory to oblige Madame," Ruth explained. "I'd do a lot for her. She's been that kind."

Ruth had been there some weeks now, too lazy or too shy to take the step that would involve another change.

"I don't ardly like to see you there, Ruth," said Ernie gently. "I don't really."

She lifted her face to him in the darkness.

"Where?"

"The Third Floor."

Ruth turned her face to him. Her wall was down. She was talking intimately almost as a woman to a woman she trusts.

"I don't hardly myself," she said in the musing voice of the disturbed. "The gentlemen are that funny. Seem scarcely respectable, some of em. And the couples too. Might not be married the way they go on. London, I suppose."

He glanced at her covertly.

She met his eyes — so frank, so fearless.

What a man of the world Ernie felt beside this white ewe-lamb straying far from the fold in the hollow of its native coombe!

They were skirting now the fosse of the Redoubt.

Before them on the shore rose the great Hotel, like a brilliantly lighted mausoleum, blocking out a square patch of stars.

They made towards it.

"Ruth," said Ernie quietly, "if I was you I'd get Madame to change you. Second Floor's more your sort. More steadified. There's a Bishop there now and his wife and three-four daughters or so. Go to bed at ten, and get up at seven. I can hear em all a-snorin in chorus like so many hoggets in a stye when I take the lift down last turn at night."

"Hap I will," said Ruth thoughtfully. "Madame'd take me back herself, only she's got a German maid now, and

I wouldn't do anything to put Madame out for worlds."

A struggle was taking place in Ernie's heart. If Ruth left the Third Floor for the Second he would still see her sometimes. If she left the Hotel altogether he might lose her.

"Ruth," he said at last. "I sometimes wonder why you stay on there at all."

She glanced at him mischievously.

"Shall I tell you?" she asked, her voice deeper than ever.

"Yes."

"It's the bathin. I just do adore the swimmin. Madame arranges it nice for the maids. And the season's coming on. We start next week if this weather holds. When the season's over I shall cut my stick — if so be Madame wasn't to want me for her own maid again."

She chuckled at her own cunning.

They came to the servants' gate.

Ernie stopped.

"Good-bye, Ruth," he said. "I'll say good-night."

She looked up at him surprised.

"Aren't you comin then?" she asked.

"Yes," he said. "But I'm just a-goin to finish my fag first."

She gave him a delicious look.

Innocent as she was, she understood his consideration and thanked him for it mutely.

She gave him her hand. He took it, shook it, and held it awhile, as though weighing it. It was firm and very capable.

Swiftly he lifted it to his lips and kissed it.

She made no protest, looking at him with kind eyes that knew no thought of coquetry.

Then she vanished with her flowers.

He gave her five minutes, and then followed her.

Ruth had been detained in the basement, and was vanishing up the back-stairs as he entered, her roses in her hand.

Don John, the Austrian, with his dingy face and greasy moustache, winked at Ernie as he passed.

"Peach," he whispered. "Don't you wish you ad the pickin of her?"

BOOK V

CAPTAIN ROYAL

CHAPTER XXXIV

HIS ARRIVAL

RUTH was as good as her word.

Next day she went to see Madame, and asked to be moved from the Third Floor.

Madame, the majestic, standing before the fire, dressed like a fashion-plate, put down her cigarette and looked at the young woman standing before her, slightly abashed, and uncertain how her request would be received.

She was genuinely fond of the girl, and had sent her to the Third Floor at some personal sacrifice because she wished her to have chances she would not get elsewhere.

Now she showed herself kind, if by no means understanding. She thought Ruth foolish and hinted as much. With foreign girls she could talk so much more plainly than with these wooden Englishwomen who understood so little. It was because Ruth was English, yet looked foreign, and showed a certain swift comprehension rare in her race, that Madame had taken to her at first.

However, she assented to the girl's request as always with a good grace, if reluctantly.

"Very well, Ruth," she said. "You are one of ze quiet ones, I see. Zey are too gay on ze Third Floor. I zought zey might be. It was only an egsperiment. One of ze maids on ze Second Floor is going next week. I vill move you zen. But you vill not get ze tips, you know. Bishops don't pay."

"Thank you, Ma'am," said Ruth, and left the room.

Two evenings later the Hohenzollern Express, as the non-stop train from Victoria to Beachbourne was called, brought an unusual number of visitors to the Hotel.

The palm-lined hall was packed with forlorn travellers,

wandering about trying to find themselves; the clerks in the office were besieged; the porters run off their legs.

Ernie was on the lift that evening. He stood in the corridor, listening to the hubbub in the hall, and waiting for the first rush of visitors who had arranged themselves and appropriated keys, when he saw a man emerge from Madame's private sitting-room at the end of the passage.

Then he came marching resolutely down the corridor, absorbed, swift, direct, with eyes neither to right nor left, wearing a Burberry, and the short tooth-brush moustache that was still the rage in the British Army; a young man of a type so familiar to Ernie that he smiled on recognizing it.

The traveller entered the passenger-lift with a curt,

"Third Floor!"

It was Captain Royal.

Ernie had just been long enough away from the Regiment to see everything connected with it through the roseate mists of sentimentality.

He pulled the cord and the lift ascended.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said shyly. "Might you remember me?"

Royal turned his slate-blue eyes on the other, and extended a sudden hand.

"What! Caspar, the cricketer!" he cried with the gay nonchalance peculiar to him. "Rather! — that stand against the Rifle Brigade at Pindi? Yes. What! Got a job you like? What!"

"Pretty fair, sir," answered Ernie. "Home on long leave, sir?"

"Yes, six months. I'm going to work for the Staff College."

"All well with the Regiment when you left, sir?"

"Yes, thanks. All merry and bright. We won the Polo Cup. Mr. Ffloukes — you remember him in D Company — got himself mauled by a bear in the hills. Silly young feller. Quite unnecessary, I thought. . . . The Colonel's retired and come home. Living somewhere in these parts, I believe."

The lift stopped at the Third Floor.

Ernie carried the Captain's suit-case to his room.

"I'll bring your heavy luggage myself, sir," he said, for he had quite taken the other under his wing.

As he left the room he met Ruth.

Ernie beckoned her mysteriously.

"That's my old skipper," he whispered. "You look after him now. He's just all right."

Ruth regarded him with amused eyes.

"Why, you're quite excited," she said.

"Ah," answered Ernie. "We're Hammer-men, him and me. That's enough. *Quite* enough." He disappeared down the shaft with a knowing and consequential air, hushing her with lordly hand.

The Captain rang for his hot water.

Ruth took it him.

He turned round as she entered and flashed his eyes at her curiously.

"Will you help me unpack?" he said quietly. "I haven't brought a man."

She knelt beside the suit-case, while he stood at the chest of drawers.

She handed him his clothes, and he arranged them orderly and with an unerring precision that appealed to her methodical mind.

His clothes were beautiful too: so fine, so fresh, so like himself, Ruth thought. She handled the silken shirts, when his back was turned, and stroked the flimsy vests.

Once he turned swiftly to find her pressing some diaphanous under-wear against her cheek.

He laughed; and she blushed.

"That's from Cashmere," he said. "Pleasant to the touch — what?"

"It's beautiful," answered Ruth.

When Ernie entered with the heavy luggage, Ruth was kneeling at the suit-case, the Captain standing over her.

Ernie's somewhat artificial enthusiasm suddenly melted away.

He wasn't very pleased.

The Captain had brought a quantity of luggage too, and clearly meant to make a prolonged stay.

CHAPTER XXXV

HIS ORIGIN

CAPTAIN ROYAL was the son of his father; but very few people knew anything about that father. And those few knew little more than that he had made money in business in the North.

The business in fact was that of an unregistered dentist at Blackpool.

Albert Ryle was a curious little fellow. He lived more like a machine than it was possible to conceive a human being could live. He was so regular as to be almost automatic: he had no virtues, and his vices were vigorously suppressed. Early in life he planned out his career according to Programme, and he stuck to it with methodical precision throughout. During his working life, happily for him, there were no such seismic disturbances, utterly beyond his control, as have completely upset the Programme of like automaton men in our own day.

Nor did the unexpected and catastrophic in the way of illness or sudden love ever overwhelm him.

He did not marry: that was part of the Programme. He did not enjoy himself. He lived meanly; but his practice grew and grew, especially among the well-to-do artisans. The middle and upper class he left in the main to the qualified practitioners.

He was extraordinarily efficient, thorough, and precise in his work; he was daring too. He would administer gas himself, and happily had no accidents. He spent nothing on himself, and studied the stock-markets with the same meticulous care which he gave to the human mouth.

On his fiftieth birthday he totted up his capital account and found he had made £25,000 — just six months ahead of scheduled time.

His end had been attained. The first part of the Programme had now been accomplished.

Next day — or as near as it was possible — he sold his practice, took down his brass-plate, said good-bye to no one, for he knew no one except in the way of business; and for the first time in his life crossed the Trent, never to recross it.

Albert Ryle never looked back: he moved forward steady as a caterpillar on the trail.

In the North he left behind him everything but the accent which, to his own no small grief, and the unending anguish of his wife, he carried to the grave, and the money he had made in gloomy Lancashire.

He bought a villa in Croydon, modified his name under expert advice, and in the sun of the South country began to live.

Mr. Royal of Deepdene had made money in business in the North. Now he was going to spend it in the South.

Here began the second part of the Programme.

He married a middle-class woman, who had been a companion, and possessed some not very well-founded pretensions to family.

He entered the Church, ignoring formal admission by baptism, and took an active part in the life of the Town.

Capable and tireless, he became in time a Town Councillor, and, better still, a Justice of the Peace for Surrey. His grand ambition, never to be fulfilled in this world, was to be a Deputy Lieutenant of the county of his adoption.

There was one child of the marriage, who was christened at his wife's request, and with his full approval, Hildebrand.

The boy was sent to a first-rate preparatory school, where, being an aggressive youngster, he more than held his own.

Mr. Albert Royal was determined that his son should go to one of "our ancient public schools."

When he broached the subject, the headmaster of the preparatory school was in a dilemma.

Mr. Royal was an admirable parent from the commercial point of view. He paid the fees and never made a fuss; but there was no getting away from Mr. Royal's accent.

Mr. Wortley, an Etonian himself, didn't somehow think Eton was quite the school for Hildebrand. Too damp. There wasn't much chance of a boy getting into Winchester unless his father had been there before him. Had Mr. Royal

been at Winchester? — Ah, bad luck. Then Rugby? — But Mr. Royal wouldn't send his son to a North country school. Mr. Royal's home was in the South; and so was his heart. What about Harrow? — Mr. Wortley's face brightened. Harrow was the very thing. He could see Hildebrand at Harrow in his mind's eye.

Later when his partner came into the study, after Mr. Royal's departure, Mr. Wortley announced the news with a little grin.

"Arrow for Ildebrand," he said.

"And quite good enough too," replied the other, who was also an Etonian, with a little snort.

To Harrow, then, Hildebrand went.

And just at the appropriate moment Mr. Royal Senior died.

That was not part of the Programme, but it was consummately tactful.

"My father didn't do much. He was a magistrate in Surrey," sounded so much better than the reality incarnate, rough and red and rather harsh — with the Blackpool accent.

Mr. Royal's opportune death was, in fact, an immense relief to his suffering wife and perhaps to young Hildebrand, who was beginning to know what was what in the world in which he proposed to live and move and have his being.

His school career was a great success. Many admired, not a few envied, nobody liked him; but as a master said — "He likes himself enough to make up for that."

An extremely good-looking boy, full of self-confidence, he was an unusually fine athlete, played racquets for the school, and notched a century against Eton at Lords in a style that made men talk of F. S. Jackson at his best.

His mother was presentable and dressed extremely well.

Young Royal had no objection to being seen about with her, and even invited her down to Speech-day and introduced her to his friends at Lords. It was not to be wondered at that when she died she left the whole of the £25,000 to her only-born.

Hildebrand bore this second bereavement with character-

istic fortitude. He was just at the age when the possession of money was rare as it was useful.

He passed high into Sandhurst, and became an Under-Officer. His record there as an athlete, his bit of money, and the use he made of it, enabled him to secure a commission in the coveted Hammer-men. He joined the Regiment with a considerable and deserved reputation, which he more than maintained.

He was not popular with his brother-officers, who said quietly among themselves that he was not a Sahib; while Conky Joe went so far as to assert that he was not even a "white man"; but he was an asset to the Regiment and accepted as such.

Now he had come home on six months' leave with two objects in view. He meant to work for the Staff College — and there were few more ambitious men; and he meant to enjoy himself.

When he returned to England, there was no question where he would settle down.

He knew all about the Hohenzollern, and indeed would boast to his few intimates — and he was fond of boasting — that Madame was an old friend of his, and that he had paid his first visit to the Third Floor when still at Harrow.

Beachbourne indeed suited him very well. It possessed a first-rate crammer; if he wanted Society there was the Club at the West-end, full always of Service men retired or on leave; and he could get as much golf and cricket as he liked.

A terrific worker, he would have no distractions: for he knew very few people socially. There would be no country-house invitations for him; nor did he court them. When he had passed through the Staff College and settled down in London for a spell at the War Office he knew very well that doors, now shut to him, would open. There was no hurry about that. He didn't mean to marry yet: he meant to enjoy himself.

In a word, Captain Royal was an adventurer of a kind by no means uncommon in our day. A Tory in his opinions and his prejudices he lacked the one thing that can make a Tory admirable, and that is Tradition.

When Colonel Lewknor once defined him as "A first-rate officer and a first-class cad," Conky Joe, the kindest of men but a first-rate hater, who had never quite got over the bias imbibed in the atmosphere of the "greatest of all schools," replied with scorn, rare scorn,

"Well, what d'you expect of Harrow?"

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE CAPTAIN BEGINS HIS SIEGE

THE morning after Captain Royal's advent, Ernie, going his round of the Third Floor, dropping boots at various doors, stopped outside No. 72.

The door was open; and Ruth stood at the window looking sea-wards.

It was early yet, scarcely seven, but clearly the Captain was already up and out. Ernie stood in the door, admiring the lines of the girl's big young figure, the curve of her neck and shoulders and the glossy black of her hair. He made a little whistling sound.

Ruth turned, saw who it was, and beckoned to him.

The window looked out over the lawns and foreshore on to the sea, brisk and broken in the sun.

The tide was brimming, and swinging in, green-hued, white-tipped, and splashed with shadows.

The bathing-raft was wobbling in the short chop. There were no bobbing heads about it now. It was too early in the season, too early in the morning, and the sea was too rough. But a figure, white in the sun, balanced on the unsteady raft, then shot arrow-wise into the sea.

Another moment and a black head bounced up out of the water. Then there was the flash of an arm, rising and falling swiftly, as the swimmer strode away for the horizon.

"Straight out to sea!" cried Ernie. "That's the Captain! — Buffet em!"

"I wish I was a man," mused Ruth. "Go in like that — just as you are."

She took up her duster, and resumed her work. The bed was already made.

"You're early at it," said Ernie, glancing round.

"Yes," answered Ruth. "I'm to do his room every morning while he's in the water. He's going to work up here after breakfast."

"Hot stuff!" said Ernie, trying to work up enthusiasm. "He'll command the old Battalion one day, the skipper will. Good old Hammer-men!"

Half an hour later the Captain was back. His hair still wet, was crisp still and very dark; while the brine crusted his handsome face. He had run up the stairs, three at a stride, too impetuous to await the lift. In flannels, a sweater with a broad collar, and white shoes, he looked cool and clean and strenuous as the water from which he just emerged. At the top of the stairs he met the shabby porter with his collarless shirt, his scrubby hair, and rough hands.

Ruth, coming down the corridor, marked the meeting of the two men.

"Mornin," said the Captain, brief as his own moustache.

"Morning, sir," grinned Ernie, rolling by, full of self-consciousness.

An hour later, he saw Ruth coming out of 72 with a tray. Ernie stopped.

"Havin breakfast in his own room?" he asked.

"Yes," said Ruth quietly.

The monosyllable seemed to knock at Ernie's heart.

He hesitated a moment.

"I'm sorry you're leaving the Third Floor, Ruth," he said. "For me own sake like."

"Thank you," answered Ruth.

He noticed she was strangely curt.

A week later Madame sent for the girl.

"Ruth, are you still in any hurry to change your Floor?" she asked.

The girl looked down, colouring faintly.

"Think it over, vill you?" said Madame. "There is no hurry."

"Thank you, Ma'am," said Ruth, quivering.

She returned to her work. A bell was ringing. It was 72.

Ruth went.

The Captain was manicuring his nails at the window. He looked up as she entered.

"Shut the door!" he said.

She obeyed.

"Come here!" he ordered.

She went.

He looked at her, in his blue eyes a laughing sternness.

"What's this?" he asked.

"What, sir?"

"I hear you're thinking of deserting."

She stood before him, her bosom rising and falling.

"Ruth," he said gravely, "you've got to make a home for me while I'm here. I'm a pore lone orphan — no mother, or sister, or friends. You've got to mend me and mind me, as my old nurse used to say. D'you see? I look to you."

"Very well, sir," answered Ruth.

Whatever else Ruth might feel about Captain Royal, there was no doubt that she admired him. And to do the man justice, there was not a little to admire. In any company, except the best, he shone. And on the Third Floor, in that meretricious atmosphere of fat-necked Jews, dubious foreigners, and degenerate Englishmen, Royal with his strenuous ways of the public-school boy, his athletic figure, and keen walk stood out like a sword among gamps in an umbrella-stand.

He lived too with the deliberate speed of the man who knows his goal and means to get there.

There was no need to call him. He was up every morning at 6.15, and into the sea, rain or fine, rough or smooth, at 6.30. At 7 he was back again in his room, stripped, and doing physical exercises. At 8 Ruth brought his breakfast; and by 9 he had settled to his morning's work. After lunch he golfed; then to his crammer; and in the evening he relaxed over a billiard-table or in the card-room.

Sometimes he went off for the night to Town.

On the first of these occasions Ernie carried his bag to the taxi with a joy for which he himself could not account.

"What! — are you off, sir?" he asked gaily. "I thought we was going to keep you all your leave."

"Only for the week-end," answered the other, with his little hard laugh. "See me back on Monday."

Ernie's heart fell.

He went upstairs, saw Ruth, and feigned surprise.

"What, still here, Ruth?"

"Yes," the girl answered in her quiet way. "I shan't move now till the Captain's gone."

She said it quite simply. She was too great, too spiritual, to be provocative: Ernie knew that.

He stopped full. There was a sea of fire lifting his chest and lighting his eye.

"Ruth," he said.

She saw his emotion, and stayed with the courtesy natural to her.

"Will you walk out with me?"

She met his eyes with the courage, dark, flashing, and kind, he loved so much.

"I couldn't do that, Ernie," she said so gently that he loved her all the more.

"Why not then?"

"I'm afraid."

"What of?"

"Afraid you might ask me more'n what I can give."

"I'll run the risk!" cried Ernie. "I'm ready!"

She shook her head.

He took her hand.

"I'm a good man, Ruth," he said with the almost divine simplicity of the class to which he now belonged.

She overwhelmed him with tenderness.

"O, I know you are, Ernie!" she said in her purring voice of a wood-pigeon at evening. "But I'm not thinking of settling — not yet."

The love-passage relieved Ernie immensely. He would face defeat, face Captain Royal, face the future with confidence now.

Thereafter for some time he went about his work whistling, so that Don John, the Austrian, winked at his mates behind his back, and said,

"He thinks she's for him! No fool like an English fool!"

When he came back from his week-end away, Captain Royal went straight to Madame's private sitting-room, which

was at the end of the Third Floor. As he came out and passed along the corridor he saw Ruth sitting on the window-sill in the passage, where Ernie had suddenly known himself in love with her.

He stopped. There was a bundle of mending beside her, and among it he recognized his own pyjamas.

Royal knew there was a sitting-room for the maids, called by the habitués of the Third Floor, "the Nunnery," and wondered.

That evening, when she came to put out his evening clothes, he said to her,

"You don't care about using the maids' sitting-room, Ruth?"

She did not answer.

"The other girls aren't your sort? too rowdy — what?"

Again she fell back on characteristic silence.

Each of the bed-rooms on the Third Floor had a dressing-room attached.

"Well, you know my hours," he continued. "You use my dressing-room to work in whenever you like. I never use it myself; and I know you've a lot to do for me."

Ruth thanked him; and after that in the afternoons, when he was out, and in the evenings, when he was at dinner, she would sit in his dressing-room and work.

One evening, as she sat beside the window, her dark head bent over her work, she was aware that he was standing over her.

He had come in on her very quietly from behind, not through his bed-room but through the door of the dressing-room that opened into the corridor.

She rose to go, gathering her work.

He put his hand upon her shoulder, and pressed her gently back into the chair. She trembled beneath his touch.

"No," he said. "Don't go. I like to have you there."

She glanced swiftly at the door behind her.

"That's all right," he laughed. "It's shut." Then he moved into the bed-room.

"I'm not going to close the door," he said, "because I like to see you there when I look up from my work."

She lifted her eyes to his, full of confidence and affection. He was not a man; he was a God — and to be treated as such: he could do no wrong.

He smiled at her friendly from his chair.

"I'm going to read Jomini," he said. "Ever hear of Jomini, Ruth? — nice name, isn't it? Joe-mine-eye."

After that Captain Royal was less regular in his attendance at the billiard-room after dinner.

He read in his bed-room; Ruth worked in the dressing-room; sometimes the door between the two rooms was open; and sometimes they talked.

One evening Ernie, descending from a higher floor in the lift, marked Céleste listening at the dressing-room door. She saw him, winked, and tripped away.

"It's a caise!" she whispered, making a hollow of her hand. "A h'iceberg's hot stuff once it begins to go."

CHAPTER XXXVII

HE DRIVES A SAP

ONE morning, after Captain Royal had been at the Hotel two months, Ernie missed the familiar soft thud of his feet as he came up the stairs three at a time after his bathe.

Ernie looked at his watch.

It was half-past seven; and the Captain was regular as the seasons. He wondered what was up. The strange dis ease which possessed him, whenever his thoughts turned to Royal, was on him strong.

Then Ruth came out of the Captain's room. Her face, always grave, was graver than usual. The note of restraint Ernie had marked in it of late, whenever he met her, had given place to one of anxiety.

"What's up?" he asked.

"He's not getting up," she answered. "He's not well. Looks to me like the hot-chills."

The sick man heard the voices outside.

"Caspar!" he called.

"Sir."

Ernie entered. Captain Royal lay in bed, a touch of colour in his cheeks, his skin dry, his hair bristling, his eyes suffused.

"I've got a touch of fever," he said. "And my head's stupid. You don't remember the prescription they used to give us in India. Quinine and — what?"

Ernie was far too vague to be of any help, and was testily dismissed. He left the sick-room. The Captain's helplessness roused the woman in him and disarmed the jealous male.

"It's nothing much," he told Ruth. "Only a go of malaria. He used to get it in India. Don't you worry."

Later in the morning Madame visited the sick man, and

summed him up with those fine shrewd eyes of hers that let so little escape them.

The Captain was clearly running a temperature.

Madame put her plump be-ringed hand on his lean one, and then rang.

Ruth came.

"Have you a thermometer, Ruth?"

Ruth had — a legacy from Miss Caryll's days. In a moment she re-appeared with it, washed it, and put it into the Captain's mouth. Then she plucked it out, and took it to the window. It marked 102.

"What is it?" asked the sick man.

"It's a little up," answered Ruth, shaking the thermometer down.

"What is it?" repeated the other.

Ruth had not nursed Miss Caryll for two years in vain.

"It's a shade over normal," she said. "Hap it'll be a bit higher this evening."

Outside she told Madame.

"I shall send for Mr. Trupp," that lady said, and telephoned at once.

The great man came, grumbling and grousing. What did *he* — who loved to describe his surgery as carpentry, and himself as a mechanic — know of Indian fevers?

Madame took him herself to the Captain's room. Ruth brought a jug of hot water.

"You must just stop in bed till it's burned itself out," said the Doctor, wiping his hands and coughing.

The sick man cursed.

"You won't want a nurse," said Madame. "Ruth'll do everything you want."

Mr. Trupp looked up and for the first time noticed the girl by the wash-stand. He seemed put out and glanced at Madame.

"I didn't know you were on this floor, Ruth," he said, and added to the Captain —"Ruth nursed a patient of mine for two years in this very Hotel, didn't you, Ruth? She can take a temperature, feel a pulse, and keep a chart with the best of em, and you'll be all right in a day or two."

Ruth, who loved Mr. Trupp, as she loved no one else on earth, blushed and smiled.

"That's settled then," said the Captain from his bed.

Outside in the corridor Mr. Trupp, busy winding his comforter about his neck, saw Ernie and shook hands with him.

"Well, Ernie," he said gruffly. "I forgot you were here. How *you* getting on?"

"Nicely, thank you, sir," answered Ernie, forgetful for the moment of all his trouble. "Nothing much amiss with the Captain, I hope, sir?"

"D'you know him?" asked Mr. Trupp.

"Why, sir!" cried Ernie, aggrieved. "He was our adjutant. And a fine officer too. Mr. George'll tell you all about him, though they was in different Battalions. He's well be-known all over India because of his cricket."

"O, he's a Hammer-man too, is he?" said Mr. Trupp, interested. "Quite a collection of you here. D'you know Colonel Lewknor?"

"Know him, sir!" cried Ernie. "The Colonel! — The best officer and nicest gentleman we had. Is he down here?"

"Yes, he's taking a house in Holywell, I believe. . . . Take my bag down to the car, will you? — You'll find Alf outside. I must just wait and speak to the Manageress."

Ernie willingly obeyed.

Outside was the familiar chocolate-coloured car; and a little way off was Alf standing in the grass exchanging confidences with some one in the boothole in the basement.

He saw Ernie and broke off his conversation at once to come lurching towards his brother, licking his lips, and on his colourless face the familiar leer.

"Say, Ern!" he began confidentially.

Ernie, paying no heed, opened the door of the car, and put the bag inside.

"That was a pretty pick-up you got hold of top of the bus that time," Alf continued quietly.

Ern faced his brother.

"What's this then?" he asked, rather white.

"That tart top o the bus that night."

Ernie was breathing deep as he shut the door of the car elaborately.

"I thought you was a churchman then," he said. "Took the sacraments, marched in processions and carried the bag, from what I hear of it."

Alf looked round warily. Then he came boring in upon the other, as though determined to penetrate his secret.

"What if I do!" he said. "'Taint Sunday to-day, is it? —'Taint Sunday *all* the time."

Some one buried in the boot-hole laughed.

"What's that got to do with it?" Ernie asked. "D'you keep a dirty tongue all the week, and put on a clean one o Sunday with yer change o clothes?"

"Who was she?" persisted Alf, his eyes like the waters of a canal at night glittering in the murk of some desolate industrial quarter.

Ernie folded his arms. He said nothing; but the lightning flickered about his face.

"I know who she was then," continued Alf, his great head weaving from side to side. "She was one of the totties from the Third Floor — where you work." He thrust his head forward, and his eyes were cruel. "*D'you* think she's for you? — Earning twenty-two a week, aren't you? — and what the German Jews toss you. Why, I doubt if she'd fall to ME — and I'm a master-man."

Jeering laughter from the bowels of the earth punctuated his words.

Just then Mr. Trupp came through the great swing-doors. He stopped for a word with the hall-porter.

"You settled down here, Ernie?" he asked.

"Pretty fair, sir, thank you," Ernie answered without enthusiasm.

Mr. Trupp entered the car. He seemed perturbed.

"Well, if you want to make a change at any time, let me know," he said. "I only suggested this as a make-shift for you, till we could fix you up in something better, you know."

The Doctor drove home in surly mood.

It was not till the evening that his wife arrived at the root of the trouble.

"You remember Miss Caryll's maid?" he said.

"Ruth Boam?" cried Mrs. Trupp. "That charming girl who used to bring us over strawberries from the Dowerhouse at Aldwoldston."

Mr. Trupp stirred his coffee.

"She's on the Third Floor at the Hohenzollern."

Mrs. Trupp put down her work.

"Temporarily," continued the other. "But she oughtn't to be there at all, a good girl like that. I told Madame as much."

"I should think you did!" cried Mrs. Trupp, flashing out like a sword from a scabbard. "It's a crime!"

"Madame's not a criminal," replied her husband quietly. "She's kind. But she's one of the people who carries her kindness altogether too far."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE SERPENT

ERNIE, who was never very fond of work, had on the Captain's arrival stored his trunks in the dressing-room to save himself the trouble of carting them up to the box-room in the roof.

Now it occurred to him that if a nurse was called in to attend the sick man there might be trouble about the trunks.

On the morning after Mr. Trupp's visit he determined, therefore, to move them before he was found out.

Very early he opened the dressing-room door and blundered in.

A girl with bare arms was standing before the looking-glass, dressing her dark hair; and the bed had been slept in.

"O, beg pardon, Miss," said Ernie, genuinely abashed.

The girl smiled and held up a hushing finger.

"I didn't know, Miss," continued Ernie, still caught in his own confusion.

"Why d'you call me Miss?" asked Ruth calmly.

Ernie laughed lamely.

"Did I?" he said. "I don't know." He found relief in bustle. "I was just a-goin to shift some o them trunks."

"Thank you kindly," answered Ruth. "It'd make more room like."

Ernie set to work.

"How's the Captain?" he asked.

"Middlin or'nary," Ruth replied. "He didn't sleep unaccountable well."

"You look a bit tired yourself, Ruth," said Ernie.

"I was up to him time or two in the night," the girl answered. "I shall go off this afternoon. Madame's very kind."

Ernie went out, swallowing his misery as best he could.

The fever took its normal course. The Captain needed very little attention. Ruth gave him his medicine, tidied his bed, took his temperature, and saw to his food.

He lay in a fog, amused with her, angry with himself.

"You're top-hole at this job, Ruth," he would say.

On the third night, in the small hours, he rang. The bell was on a chair at Ruth's side. She rose at once. The dressing-gown in which she wrapped herself was a flimsy affair, and showed the lines of her large young body. The light beside the Captain's bed was switched on.

"Ruth," he said, "I'm better. I've broken out in a muck-sweat. I'm dripping. Get me some fresh pyjamas and a towel."

His face was shining with perspiration, his hair dark.

She went to a drawer.

"Bring me a towel," he said. "And give me a rub down."

She obeyed and clothed him in his new pyjamas.

He lay back, dry and contented.

The dawn was breaking. She lit the spirit-lamp and crouched beside it, graceful and brooding, her nightdress spread on the floor about her like a train of snow.

"I'll chill you a drop o milk," she said in her deep voice, with the coo of comfort in it. "It comes over cold towards dawn."

He drank readily and seemed refreshed.

"That's better," he said.

Ruth watched him with kind eyes.

"Now you'll sleep, I reck'n," she said.

"Ruth," he answered, "come here."

She came.

He took her hand and kissed it.

"That's all," he said. "Thank you. Good-night."

She went back to the dressing-room and closed the door behind her. Then she went to the window.

The tide was low, the sea still dark, and on the horizon of it a bank of saffron, from which in time the sun would appear.

On the far edge of the sands, pearl-hued and desolate, the waves stirred faintly. All else was stillness and immensity. Not a soul, not a ship, not a movement.

The sweep, the nakedness, the inexorable passivity of earth and sky and sea, man-forsaken and forlorn, seemed for once to affect the girl with fear. She retired hastily to her bed and sought the shelter of sleep.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE LASH AGAIN

IN a week the Captain was in the sea again, and living the same fiercely strenuous life he had done before his attack.

Ernie congratulated him upon his recovery with a cheerfulness he by no means felt.

A question haunted him.

Was Ruth still sleeping in the dressing-room? . . .

Could the girl be so indiscreet? . . .

Nothing could have been easier for him than to answer the question for himself by peeping. But he would not do it, for the hotel-porter was a gentleman.

The question that troubled him was, however, soon to answer itself.

One afternoon, when Ruth was out to Ernie's knowledge, he was surprised to hear in the dressing-room the familiar voices of Céleste and another maid, hushed and whispering.

"She keeps the key her side," one was saying.

"What's it matter who keeps the key?" the other answered. "That's only a bluff."

The door was slightly ajar.

"He don't seem to have give her nothing," said the one at the dressing-table discontentedly.

"Only cash. Cash is the thing. Then you can get what you like for yourself."

"Here's her Bible and pray-book! *Look!* — Ain't she just the little limit? — and that close with it too."

"It's always the same. It's the dark uns are the deep uns."

"Don't you dare to chip her then," warned the other. "She's Madame's own ducky-darlin-doodle-day."

Ernie opened the door.

The two girls turned in a scared flutter.

"There! — It's only old Ernie Boots!" cried Céleste relieved. "He don't count, Ernie don't.— But you give me the palpitations though."

Ernie held the door wide.

"You've no business in here," he said sternly.

"No one has — only the Captain, old cock," retorted Céleste flippantly.

The two girls flirted away with high noses and a rustle of silken underwear.

Ernie looked round the little room with the eyes of a furtive watch-dog. He had no business there; and being there he ought to make it his duty to see nothing. But he did see; and what he saw was that the bed was *not* in use.

Thrown carelessly upon it was a regimental blazer, obviously awaiting repair, and a pair of socks in like case. Beside them was a work-bag. He moved the blazer and saw beneath it a silver cigarette-case. Then in the grate he saw the burnt end of a cigarette.

With beating heart, but unruffled air, he went out.

The two mocking-birds were perched on a window-sill at the end of the corridor.

"Pore old Ernie boy!" they cried in chorus. "Did he think she was for him?" . . .

The story trickled down to the boot-room in the basement, which was a kind of cess-pool into which all the moral filth in the Hotel poured and finally accumulated.

Don John openly mocked Ernie.

"Here's Caspar! — Thought he'd have a chance against the toff!"

Ernie flashed round on him.

"Stow it!" he ordered.

The Austrian was afraid.

"Soldier! soldier!" he croaked, hiding his fear behind hideous laughter, and reported his enemy to Salvation Joe.

That worthy, swollen and stiff with righteousness as the Jehovah of the Israelites, and glad of his chance, tackled Ernie on the subject.

"What's this then?" he said, stopping the other.

"What, sir?" asked Ernie.

"Fighting in the boot-hole," answered Jehovah in his voice of thunder, subdued and distant.

"I don't know nothing of it," said Ernie, honestly taken aback.

Jehovah, the majestic, in his flaming jersey, could sneer.

"Ah, don't you, my lad?" he said. "Well, I do. Let's have no more of it."

The two men went on their way: Salvation Joe to the Manager's office to make his report.

"Always the same with these old soldiers," he said. "It's up with their fists at the first onset. No reasonableness in em. Can't keep em off of it."

"Better keep him anyway till the end of the season," said the Manager. "We don't want a change now."

"No, sir. I don't want a change any time," said the head-porter, on the defensive. "But order is order. That's all I says."

The pressure of necessity was indeed squeezing the softness out of Ernie.

Enemies thronged his path. He was becoming wary and watchful. Of old, when in the course of life he had come up against hostility and obstruction, he had met it either by evasion or the non-resistance so fatally easy to a man of his temperament. It was different now. His enemies were leagued together to rob him of something dearer than himself. Therefore he would stand: therefore he would fight. There grew upon him a dignity, a restraint, above all a sternness that men and women alike remarked and respected.

Céleste ceased to mock him; Don John kept his distance; and the Captain was on his guard.

Ernie was sure of it: for Royal was nothing of a diplomatist when dealing with an enemy whom he despised.

Ruth, too, avoided Ernie now.

He noticed it, and did not attempt to approach her.

The two were drawing away, and yet, Ernie sometimes thought, coming closer — for all the girl's grave reserve.

He at least was climbing heights where he had never been before.

Up there in the eternal snows it was lonely but bracing.

He was putting on an armour of ice. Clothed thus, he knew that nothing could hurt him. He could bear all things, conquer all men.

Once at that time Mr. Pigott met him in Old Town.

"Ern," he said, eyeing the other curiously, "I've got a job for you in my yard, if you like it. What about it?"

"No, sir," answered Ernie, almost aggressively. "I'm going to stick where I am."

"No offence anyway," growled the other, striding huffily on his way. . . . "I might have been insulting him instead of trying to help him," the aggrieved man reported to Mr. Trupp later.

"Yes," said the Doctor. "He's under the Lash again. I see that. And he's growing because of it. Men do — if they are men. If they aren't they just break."

"You and your Lash," grumbled the other. "There are other stimulants in the world."

Mr. Trupp pursed his lips.

"Perhaps," he grinned. "But none so effective."

His father, too, noticed the change in his elder son.

Once as they were sitting together, above the chalk-pit, on one of Ern's afternoons off, after a long silence, he said,

"How goes it, Boy-lad?"

"What, dad?"

"The affair."

Ernie looked away, teasing the bent between his teeth.

"None too well, dad."

The old man laid a hand on his.

"Wade out into it!" he said. "Trust the stream! It'll carry you — if you'll let it."

Ernie's mother too, curiously sure in some of her intuitions, felt his trouble, was aware of his new-found courage, and came to him.

It had always been so with her from his childhood.

Whenever he put out his strength she rallied to him in full force. When in weakness he fell away she left him. It was as though all her woman's power of buttressing had been given to the father, so that there was nothing left to satisfy the demands of her seeking elder son.

That evening she gave him roses from her little garden before he went, and watched him round the corner.

Then she retreated indoors, and standing thin-shouldered in the door of the study, shot at the long loose figure by the fire one of her customary crude remarks.

" He's hanging on the Cross," she said.

Edward Caspar stared into the grate.

" He'll rise again," he answered.

CHAPTER XL

CLASH OF MALES

ERNIE, carrying his roses, mounted the bus.

Opposite the *Star,* he marked a gaunt figure, standing on the steps of the Manor-house. There was something of the kindly vulture about the figure's pose that was strangely familiar. Ernie leapt to sudden life. It was the Colonel — without his sun-helmet. Ernie was off the bus in a moment, and sidling shyly up to the object of his worship.

The Colonel, waiting on the steps, watched the antics of the approaching devotee with satirical indifference.

"Contemplating assault or adoration?" he asked mildly. Then he stooped, extending a skinny claw.

"What, Caspar!" he called, his cadaverous face lighting up.

"That's me, sir," grinned Ernie, wagging his tail with furious enthusiasm.

Just then a chocolate-bodied car drove up, and Ernie was aware of Alf looking at him. The door of the car opened; and Captain Royal stepped out.

"Ah, Colonel!" he cried in his brisk hearty voice.

The Colonel laid a finger on the other's sleeve.

"You remember Caspar, Royal?" he said.

"I do," replied Royal briefly. "Coming in, sir?" as Mr. Trupp's door opened at last.

Ernie turned down the hill, burning his white flare. The Captain's brutal insolence had gone home.

The Colonel reported the incident to his wife that evening.

"I could have struck the swine!" he said with unusual ferocity. "Conky Joe was right. He never was a white man. A piebald from birth, that feller."

Mrs. Lewknor churned the incident in her mind. It was a slur on the Regiment, and therefore a capital offence.

"What a cad!" she said. "Our dear Caspar too! Royal's the only officer in the Regiment would behave like that. Where's he stopping?"

"My dear, where would Royal stop?" said the Colonel. "The Hohenzollern — Third Floor — where Caspar's working."

He nodded his big head discreetly.

"How do you know?" asked Mrs. Lewknor, eyeing him.

"Trupp told me," replied the Colonel.

Ernie returned to the Hotel with his roses.

Later that evening he went to the door of the dressing-room of 72 and knocked quietly.

There was no answer. He entered and laid the roses on the table.

As he did so the door between the two rooms opened, and Ruth stood in it, watching him with hostile eyes.

In the room behind her Ernie could see the Captain in his smoking-jacket before the fire with a cigarette between his lips. Then the Captain saw him too. His easy expression changed in a flash; and he acted as always without a moment's hesitation.

He strode towards the open door between the two rooms, brushing Ruth almost rudely aside.

"Now no more of it!" he said with brutal savagery. "I've had enough!"

There was no light in the dressing-room but that which came through the uncurtained window from the moonlit sea, and the beam from the bed-room.

In the dimness the eyes of the two men clashed.

For a second the habit of discipline, of inferiority, of bowing to the other's artificially imposed authority, overwhelmed Ernie and he wavered. Then strength came to him like a tidal wave: he steadied and stood his ground.

In the eyes of his enemy he recognized in a flash the Eternal Brute, domineering, all-devouring, ruthless in the greed of its unbridled egotism, whose familiar features had been stamped indelibly, from the beginnings of Time, upon the retentive tablets of his race-memory.

Ernie was face to face with something in which he had

never entirely believed — the Ogre of whom the Socialists spoke: Capitalism incarnate, stripped of its Church-trimmings, the Monster remorseless and obscene, to whom the Children of Men were but as the grass of the fields that went to feed the unquenchable fires in its sagging belly.

Quite suddenly the veil had been drawn aside, the roseate mists of sentimentality dispersed; and he beheld Human Nature, naked and terrible — the Animal who called himself Man — an Animal inspired beyond belief by the Devil of Lust and Cruelty, glowering out at him now from the ambush of a face created after the likeness of the Son of God.

He said slowly, more to himself than to his enemy:

"My Christ!" and left the room.

In the basement, Don John, bare-necked as a bird of prey, his cheek bulging with cheese, sat in a dingy apron and expounded his philosophy to a little group of disciples as tired and dirty as himself.

"Take advantage! — Of course dey take advantage! So would I, so would you — if we was in their shoes. Dey would be just pluddy fools not to. Dere is only so much in de world. Dey take what dey can get; and the veak to the vall. Shentlemen and Christians! Dere is no such tings. Tell the tale to mugs! — Dere is just Man and Woman, both worms, wriggled up out of the mud. Man wants Woman; and Woman wants it cushie. So de rich man buys her. Can you compete against him? — Is your body sleek with food and wine and lying in bed? — Is your spirit nourished on books and music and plays? — Can you fill her eye with your fatness, and clothe her body in furs, and adorn her hair with jewels, and fill her lap with gold? — No; de rich man buys what he wants, and he wants de best all de time. For you and me what is left over when he haf finished. Dat is so all de way through — women, wine, horses, what you vill. Touch your hat and say — *Tank you, sair. Vair much obliged.* It is always de same." He wagged a yellow fore-finger. "Dere is only two tings Ruling Class leaves to you and me." He cackled horribly. "One is Work"— he pronounced it vurk —"and de udder is War."

CHAPTER XLI

THE DECOY POND

AFTER the battle between the two men, Ruth retired into the fortress from which Ernie had lured her before the Captain's arrival.

The old restraint was on her; and hostility was now added.

She barely noticed him when they met, and he, wary for once and wise, made no advances to her.

But hope was quickening in his heart, for September was on them now, and the leave-season was drawing to an end.

One afternoon Céleste flitted past him like a wagtail.

"Cheer, Ernie-boy," she mocked. "He's going away."

"Who is?"

"Captain, my Captain."

"When?"

"At once." She halted. "But — he's taking her away with him."

Ernie turned grey.

"Who told you?"

"One of the girls. They take it in turns to sit in the dressing-room of evenings to hear the latest. It's like an aviary, they say. *Coo-bird! coo! now me! now you! You was good to me when I was ill, Ruth,* he says last night. *Now I am going to give you a treat. I'm going to take you to Paree for the week-end on my way back to India.*"

Ernie came closer. He looked ugly.

"If I catch any of you girls in there ——"

"Baa-a-a!" mocked the naughty one. "Who was caught in there himself?"

Ernie was now extraordinarily alert and vivid. The old sleepy benevolence had vanished: he was listening at last to that voice which none of us can afford to neglect, the voice which says at all times, to all men in all places —

Beware!

Salvation Joe took a professional and proprietory interest in the change, which for some obscure reason he attributed to his own direct intervention in heavenly places.

"What is it then?" he asked. "Has HE found you at last?"

Ernie, who as he gathered strength, gained also in flippancy, replied:

"There was ninety-and-nine, you mean. That lay. No, sir, He ain't found me. I've found IT though."

"Well, then, come round to the 'appy 'our on Sunday next and tell us all about it," growled the great man. "There's none so 'umble and lowly but we can learn from them, as I often says."

He tramped on his reverberating way. . . .

That night, as Ernie was on lift-duty, the telephone bell rang in the passage. He went.

"Who's that?" he asked.

"Mr. Caspar from the Garage, Old Town," came the answer. "Could I speak to Captain Royal?"

The Captain had given orders that when he was in his room of evenings after dinner, he was not to be disturbed.

"He's engaged," answered Ernie. "Could I give him a message?"

For a moment there was a pause. Then the voice began again.

"Who'm I speaking to?"

"One of the porters, sir," Ernie answered.

There was no need for him to disguise his voice: for the telephone was out of repair, and speech muffled and uncertain accordingly.

"Well, will you take down this message and see it gets to him to-night. *The car will be at the Decoy Park, East Gate, to-morrow afternoon at* 2.30."

Ernie wrote the message down, and repeated it.

"Very good, sir," he said briskly.

"Thank ye," answered Alf, and rang off.

Later, when Captain Royal came down to the smoking-room for a last cigarette before bed, Ernie took him the message.

The Captain, who had brought the art of insolence to his

inferiors to a height that only a certain type of officer, sheltered by Military Law, attains, took the note without a word, glanced at it, and tossed it into the fire.

Ernie retired with burning heart.

The conjunction of Captain Royal and Alf seemed to him sinister. But he had his armour on now, his lance in rest. His brain was working with a swiftness and precision that astonished him. He was ready for whatever might come. . . .

The old Decoy was a survival of the remote days when Beachbourne was a fishing-village, famous only for the duck-shooting on the Levels hard by. When Ernie was a lad the Decoy Pond, in its rough ambush of trees and thick undergrowth, was still the haunt of duck and snipe, and his favourite hunting-ground in the bird-nesting season. During Ernie's absence in India the Corporation had acquired it, and made of the tangled wilderness, formerly the home of fox and snipe and the shy creatures of the jungle, a fair pleasure-ground for their conquerors. Green lawns now ran down amid forest-trees and clumps of flowering shrubs to a shining ornamental water on which floated stately swans, while moorhen scudded here and there, and flotillas of foreign ducks paddled about islands gorgeous with crimson willow. A broad road ran from gate to gate; and in the woods of summer evenings young men now chased rarer game than ducks.

It was at the Eastern Gate of this resort that Alf was to meet the Captain with a car.

Ernie would meet them there too. On that he was determined.

It was not his afternoon off, but he arranged to change with a mate.

A light railway ran from the East-end of the Town along the edge of the Levels to join the main line at the wayside station known as the Decoy Park between Beachbourne and Polefax.

Ernie took the two o'clock train, and, ensconced in a third-class smoker, watched. Very soon the Captain came swinging along the platform, a light burberry over his arm, athletic, resolute, and quite the English gentleman, his coloured tie striking a charming note of gaiety in his otherwise fresh but sober costume.

Ernie watched him critically. In externals the Captain was the typical representative of a Service in which men move, like Wordsworth's cloud, all together or not at all.

For the skilled observer, indeed, the history of the British Army during the last seventy years is to be read in the evolution of the moustaches of its officers. At the moment now recorded the flowing *beau-sabreur* moustache which dominated the Service from Balaclava to Paardeberg had long gone out; while the tuft moustache which commemorated for the British Army the advent of the Great War had not yet come in. The tooth-brush or touch-me-not or crawling-caterpillar moustache, brief, severe, and bristling, which had held its own against all comers since South Africa, was still the rage; and gave the wearer that suggestion of something between a hog-maned horse-in-training and a rough-haired terrier on the look-out for a row with a rat which was the fashionable pose for the British officer in the years between the two Wars.

To be quite *comme-il-faut* Royal should have had trailing at his heels a little bustling terrier, rather like himself, harsh in manner, but virile, aggressive and keen.

But Captain Royal did not like dogs.

Ernie, chewing a fag in a corner, as he watched his enemy march by, remembered that; remembered too and suddenly that it had been common talk in the lines that Royal was not popular among his brother-officers —" not class enough " the whisper went. Ernie, who had wondered then, understood that now.

At the Decoy Park the Captain got out.

Ernie saw him off the platform, and well started down the road to the Decoy Woods before he followed.

A chilly wind blew from across the Levels.

The Captain marched along towards the Park, the tail of his burberry floating out, his green hat with the feather in it cocked to meet the breeze, the shapely curves of his legs exposed by the wind.

Just outside the Park he looked sharply behind him, but saw only a shabby figure slouching casually along some two hundred yards away.

Once inside the Park Ernie left the road and, walking swiftly among the trees at the wayside, drew closer.

Here in the woods peacocks strutted, and close by was an aviary in which parrots chuckled, golden pheasants preened themselves, and birds with gay plumage fluttered.

On the rustic bridge across the ornamental water the Captain paused and looked about him. Nominally he was observing the swans; really he was looking to see if he was being watched.

Ernie, alert in every inch of him, recognized the ruse; and drew the correct deduction that his enemy had been at this game before.

He waited in the shadow of the trees.

The Captain, satisfied, made now for the East Gate. Outside it a car was waiting. Ern recognized that chocolate body; and he recognized too that little figure in the shining black gaiters who stood beside it, and touched his hat with a furtive grin.

The two men exchanged a brief word. Alf opened the door of the car, produced something, and held it out. Ernie saw that it was a lady's fur coat.

Then Captain Royal climbed into the car, and Alf put the hood up.

Ernie approached.

Just inside the East Gate was a little wooden chalêt, where teas were served.

In this Ernie took cover.

A crowded motor-bus from Beachbourne drove up.

On the front seat was a girl in a terra-cotta-coloured felt hat.

She got down and walked towards the car.

Ernie watched, quivering.

There was only one woman in the world who walked with that direct and compelling grace.

It was clear to him that the girl was happy — lyrically so — and shy. The flow and rhythm of her every motion betrayed it abundantly.

Alf touched his hat as she approached, and opened the door.

The Captain did not descend. He was waiting inside — the spider in the background lurking to pounce upon the fly, a spider who shot forth sudden grey tentacles to enfold his prey. Ruth, clasped by the tentacles, was sucked out of sight.

Ernie was overwhelmed with a sudden desire to leap out into the road and cry:

"Don't!"

He sweated and trembled.

Then the door of the car slammed. Ruth was fast inside; and Alf, wonderfully brisk, had hopped into his seat, and was fingering the levers.

Then the car stole forward swiftly, secretly, like a cat upon the stalk.

It passed through the gate, would cross the Park, strike the Lewes road at Ratton on the way to — Lewes — Brighton — where? . . .

Ern was standing up now, forgetful of concealment. As the car swept by, Alf saw him and made a mocking downward motion with his hand, as of one pressing to earth an enemy struggling to his feet.

Ern was aware of it, of the look on Alf's face, of the two in the car.

They did not see him. The Captain was bending over Ruth, buttoning the fur coat round her throat.

Just then there rang through the silence a dreadful cry as of evil triumphant.

A peacock in the wood had screamed.

CHAPTER XLII

THE CAPTAIN'S FLIGHT

THAT night Ernie was on late lift-duty.

He was just about to lock the lift when the missing Captain came striding across the empty hall with a peremptory finger raised.

"You're late, sir," said Ernie, unlocking grudgingly.

"Third Floor," the other answered, curt as a blow.

When the lift stopped, Ernie went along the corridor to deliver a note to Madame in her room.

"Thank-you, Caspar," she said. "Good-night."

She had always felt a kindness for this soft-spoken son of the people, and the fact that he was reported to be of gentle birth had interested her.

As he was going back to the lift he met Ruth, still in her hat, coming along the corridor, bearing a tray.

She had the merry, mischievous air of a girl just back from a Sunday school treat, and still brimming with the laughter of primroses and April woods. His heart leapt up in joy and thankfulness as he beheld her.

She gave him the old gay look of affectionate intimacy, which she had withheld from him for weeks past.

"Good-night, Ernie," she said as she passed him, in a voice so low that but for its deep ringing quality he might almost have missed it.

He half hesitated.

"Good-night, Ruth," he answered, and as he disappeared down the shaft of the lift saw her, glowing with health and happiness, enter the Captain's room with her tray.

He locked the lift.

In the hall the Manager was shutting his desk in the office. He saw Ernie and called:

"Has Captain Royal come in?"

"Yes, sir."

"There's a telegram for him somewhere."

He hunted about and at last found it.

"Take it up to him now, will you?" he said. "It's been waiting since three."

Ernie toiled up the stairs, and knocked at the door of 72.

There was no answer.

He opened it slightly.

The light was on, and he entered. The room was empty. He stood a moment, quivering. Then voices from the dressing-room came to him quietly and at intervals.

He stood still, with head down, listening.

The Captain was speaking softly, insistently.

Ruth was dumb. Ernie thought she was crying.

Then he heard her voice, panting and very low,

"A-done, sir, do!"

In a moment Ernie was in eruption.

He flung against the door and tore rabidly at the handle. There was no answer from within. Ernie brought his fist down upon a panel with a left-handed punch that seemed to shake the Hotel.

"Telegram, sir!" he called in stentorian tones, threw the flimsy envelope on to the bed, and was gone.

Next morning the Captain was up early.

Ernie met him coming back from the bath-room, a towel over his arm.

Royal did not meet the eyes of his enemy.

"Have a taxi at the door at 6.45," he ordered.

"Yes, sir," answered Ernie.

A few minutes before that hour the Captain rang for the lift. Ernie found him waiting on the landing with his suitcase and took him down.

In the hall Royal, with averted shoulder, thrust a sovereign towards him.

"Here!"

Ernie flared white, and swept the outstretched hand aside with a gesture that was almost a blow.

"Never!" he cried.

For the second time the two men's eyes met and clashed;

and in a flash Ernie knew that he had conquered. The Captain had run up the sullen flag of spiritual catastrophe.

Then he turned away and marched rapidly across the hall.

Ernie went straight back to 72. The room showed every sign of a hasty departure. The floor was littered; the drawers open and still half full of clothes. Under the dressing-table were boots and shoes, on it a pair of hair-brushes, a case of studs, and the lesser paraphernalia of a man's toilet. It was clear that the late occupant had stuffed a few things into his suit-case and bolted.

The dressing-room door was shut.

Ernie went to it and listened.

There was no sound within.

"Ruth," he called gently, and opened. She was lying across the bed in her simple print-gown as though she had been felled.

It was clear that she had entered the room and been faced with — emptiness.

Her eyes were shut, and her face swam pale as the moon and still in the black circle of her hair. One foot had lost its shoe, and dangled black-stockinged and pathetic over the bed. In her hand, listlessly held, was a piece of crumpled paper — as it might have been her death-warrant.

She did not seem to breathe.

At first Ernie thought that she was dead, so wan she was, so quiet, so unaware. He did not mind very much, because he had died too; and they were together still, and closer than they had ever been.

Quietly he knelt beside her.

"Ruth," he said, and kissed the hand that lay limp at her side.

She stirred beneath his touch.

"It's all right, Ruth," he whispered.

She opened her eyes. They lay like pools of beauty, dark in her white face, and fringed with black. They spoke to him in the silence, appealing to him. They drew him, they undid him, they purged him by their suffering of all sin, lifting him into a white heaven, where was no stain of earth, no discord, no breaking despair.

He smiled at her through his tears.

"It's all right, Ruth," he repeated.

She laid her hand on his in loveliest trust.

"Goo away, Ernie," she sighed. "I just ca'a'n't a-bear it," and her eyelids closed again.

He rose to his feet.

The window was open, and the bit of crumpled paper she had been holding in her hand was tossing about the floor.

He picked it up unconsciously and went out.

It was not till some time later that he glanced at it casually before throwing it away and saw it was a ten-pound note.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE EBB-TIDE

THREE days later Ernie met in the hall of the Hotel a man he had known and disliked in the Regiment in India.

The two shook hands, Ernie grinning feebly. He was not so keen about the Regiment as he had been a few months before.

"What you doin here then, Mooney?" he asked.

"I've come for Captain Royal's heavy baggage," the other answered. "Say, which was his room?"

"I'll show you," said Ernie, and took him up.

Ruth helped in the packing.

Ernie, who came and went throughout the morning, was amazed at her.

Her heart was being eaten away; and yet she might have been packing for a stranger, so calm was she, so methodical and self-oblivious.

Once, when Ernie looked in, he saw her kneeling by the window, her back to the door, her arms deep in a half-empty trunk.

Mooney winked at him and nodded over his shoulder.

Ernie, standing in the door, met him with the face of a hostile stone.

"Can I help?" he asked.

"No, thank-you," Ruth answered. "We're nearly through."

By noon the task was finished, and the baggage downstairs piled at the back-door.

Mooney and Don John lunched together in the basement. Ernie, passing, saw them, and heard his own name mentioned. Don John was telling a story. Mooney, following Ernie with his eyes, was unpleasantly amused.

Later Ernie helped to put the luggage on a cab. He volunteered for the work and did it gladly. As the cab moved off, his heart seemed to lift and lighten. The burden he had carried for so many months was being borne away on the top of that oppressed and heavy-laden vehicle. Then his eye caught Mooney's. The man, smart almost as his master, was sitting back in the cab, his eyes half shut, and his lips slightly parted. Between them protruded the tip of his tongue.

Mooney was mocking him.

A few days later Ernie missed Ruth from the Third Floor.

He asked Céleste where she had gone.

"Gone to the Second Floor," the girl answered. "She's waiting on a missionary. Makes a nice change after the Captain."

Ernie was glad, yet sorry.

He saw little of the girl thereafter; and she avoided him.

But he still possessed the ten-pound note she had cast away on the morning of Captain Royal's departure, and was worried as to what he should do with it.

He could not send it to her, for she would know the sender. He could not give it her, for it was the price of — what?

And there was no one whom he could consult. His dad in such matters was a child; his mother would be unsympathetic; Mr. Pigott would be too simple to understand.

Then one autumn afternoon, as he was walking home across Saffrons Croft through rustling gold-drifts beneath the elms, he met Mrs. Trupp coming down the hill silvery-haired, gracious, and smiling in upon his gloom.

"Well, dreamer," she said. "Not hard to know whose son *you* are!"

Ernie looked up, and made one of those lightning resolutions of his.

"Beg pardon, 'm," he said. "Could I come and see you this evening?"

"You could, Ernie," answered the other. "And about time too!"

That evening, when the blinds were drawn, and the lamps

lit, Ernie found himself alone with his godmother in the long-windowed drawing-room, telling his story.

Mrs. Trupp, whom cruelty, in its manifold forms, could rouse to a white-hot anger that surprised those who did not know her, listened quivering and with downward eyes.

"What was the man's name?" she asked at last.

"Captain Royal," Ernie answered without hesitation.

She nodded.

The Captain had called at the Manor-house once or twice during his stay, and his easy attentions to her Bess had disquieted her for the moment; for she had disliked him from the first. But Bess, sound in her intuitions, as she was strong in her antipathies, had proved well able to care for herself.

"She's a good girl," said Ernie, still rapt in his story. "Too good for this world."

"You won't tell me her name?" asked Mrs. Trupp.

Ernie shook his head doggedly, twisting the ten-pound note between his knees. It was his father's son who refused to speak.

"Of course," she went on slowly, "your friend has not been wise, Ernie. The world would say she'd brought her troubles on her own head."

Ernie, well aware of the truth, looked at the note, and changed the subject clumsily.

"What are I to do with this?" he asked.

Mrs. Trupp had no doubts on that score.

"The proper thing to do is to return it to Captain Royal," she said.

Ernie was quite gentleman enough to understand.

"What'll be his address, I wonder?" he asked.

Mrs. Trupp went to the telephone, rang up Colonel Lewknor, and made her inquiry.

"Army and Navy Club, Piccadilly, will find him," replied the Colonel.

Mrs. Trupp went to her writing-table, addressed and stamped an envelope, and put the note inside.

"Register that, please, Ernie," she said. . . .

That evening, as she handed her husband his coffee, she remarked to him casually:

"William, who looked after Captain Royal when he was ill?"

Mr. Trupp shot two words at her.

"Ruth Boam."

Mrs. Trupp put down her sugar-tongs, quivering.

"What about her?" grunted Mr. Trupp.

"Nothing," said the lady. She added after a pause with apparent irrelevance —"Did she like you?"

"I don't know," replied Mr. Trupp shortly. "All I know is that girl ought never to have been on the Third Floor. I told Madame as much."

The next time Mrs. Lewknor came to call, Mrs. Trupp told her the whole story, as Ernie had told it her; but, like him, concealing the woman's name.

Her suppressed indignation made her almost terrible.

Mrs. Lewknor listened doggedly, looking at her toes.

She had her own views about Captain Royal, but he was in the Regiment, and the Regiment was her god, to whom she owed unquestioning allegiance.

"There's no reason to suppose it was more than a stupid flirtation," she said lamely.

"It was a *crime* on his part!" cried Mrs. Trupp with a vehemence that astounded her visitor. "A man in his position, and a girl in hers!"

That evening Mrs. Lewknor rehearsed the tale to her husband.

"Swine-man!" said the Colonel. "Just like him. And that man going about the country calling himself a Hammerman! Makes you sick."

CHAPTER XLIV

ERNIE LEAVES THE HOTEL

THE winter came and began to go.

In February the celandine peeped in the beech-woods in the coombe, and the Lords and Ladies began to unfurl their leaves, while in the little garden in Rectory Walk daffodils made a brave show.

All through the dark months Ernie had only caught an occasional glimpse of Ruth. Now he lost sight of her entirely.

One afternoon Céleste stopped him on the Third Floor.

She looked at him curiously, with a touch of gauche diffidence he had never marked in her before.

"Was you very fond of her then, Ernie?" she asked quietly.

"Who?" he inquired, surprised.

"Ruth."

Ernie stared at her.

"What's happened?"

"She's gone."

"When?"

"Some time since. Afore Christmas."

He saw that Céleste, the kindest of creatures, was genuinely moved. She turned her back, and moved to the window, biting her handkerchief to restrain her tears.

"Of course she'd no business here at all," she sobbed. "She was an innocent. She didn't know nothing. If she'd mixed with us girls we could anyway have learned her enough to keep her out of trouble. But she was that proud. Kept herself to herself."

Ernie devoured her with dark eyes.

"Where's she gone?" he asked.

"London, I expect," Céleste answered. "They always do."

The flighty little creature dried her eyes and spread her wings in the sun once more. "Poor old Ern!" she cried. "But there's better fish in the sea than ever came out of it, as the sayin is. . . . I'm not aimin at meself, mind!" she added coquettishly.

Ernie, if he heard her badinage, ignored it. As always, where his heart was concerned, he struck instantly and without fear.

He walked along the corridor and knocked at Madame's door.

She was, as usual, smoking.

"What is it, Caspar?" she asked kindly.

Ernie came to the point with almost brutal directness.

"Ruth Boam, 'm."

Madame studied her rings.

"She has left — while I was gone away," she said after a pause. "I am sorry. She was nice gurl."

Madame had only just returned from her annual visit to the sister-hotel at Brussels.

"Could you tell me where she's gone, 'm?"

Quite suddenly her large fair face wrought. She rose out of the cloud of her own smoke, and just as Céleste had done a few minutes before, went to the window and looked out. Her great shoulders heaved.

"I don't know," she said. "She has not gone home to Aldwoldston. I haf written." Then with an astonishing display of emotion:

"That man!" she cried. "I will never haf that man in my Hotels any mores."

Ernie retired, seeking and dissatisfied.

The news of his search soon spread.

In the boot-room next day, when the men were at their "Elevens," Don John met him with a jeer as he entered.

"Don't he know then?" mocked the Austrian.

"Know what?" asked Ernie.

"Where she's gone?"

Ernie put down his bread and cheese.

"Where has she gone, then?"

"Queen Charlotte's, Marylebone."

"What's Queen Charlotte's?" asked Ernie, the simple.

A rumble of cruel laughter went round the room.

"Layin-in hospital," said Don John, "for English gurls the Chairman Jews have sported with."

Ernie rose. Very deliberately he took off his apron.

"Shut the door, will you?" he said in a curious white calm. "Thank you, Bill. Now take his knife from him, some of you. You know these bloody aliens."

A silence had fallen on all.

"What's it all about?" tittered Don John, trying to brave it out.

"Arf a mo," said Ernie, rolling up his sleeves leisurely, "and then I'll show you. Now chuck him out into the ring. I thank you, Bert."

In the Hotel the feeling between the aliens and the Englishmen ran high; and the latter obeyed Ernie's injunction with a will all the more because the fame of Ernie's left-handed punch had reached the Hotel from Old Town long since.

Don John didn't like it, and he liked it less when Ernie began on him in all seriousness.

One of the foreigners slipped out.

Two minutes later Salvation Joe, magnificent in his red jersey, shouldered into the room.

"What's all this then?" he growled in his voice of a drum-major. "Thought you was a Christian, Caspar?"

Don John was spitting blood over the sink.

Ernie stood in the middle of the floor, his head a little forward, ignoring the head-porter, his fists still milling the air with a rhythmic purposefulness that was almost dreadful.

"Yes, I'm a Christian all right," he replied in musing voice. "It is more blesseder to give than to receive. I've give your friend a middlin bunt, and there's more where the same come from. He's only got to arst for it."

Salvation Joe marched away to report to the Manager.

"And went on after I'd spoken," he said. "Saucy with it too."

Christmas was over; Easter some weeks away; things were very slack.

The Manager was a thick young German with wavy black hair parted in the middle. He now sent for Ernie.

"You can go at the end of your month," he said. "I'm sick of it."

"You ain't the only one," retorted Ernie. "I'll go now."

"Then you'll go without your wages," replied the Manager.

Ernie went upstairs to his dormitory, dressed, gathered his few belongings, and came downstairs deliberately and with dignity.

He felt exalted.

Salvation Joe met him with a sardonic smile.

"What, reelly goin?" he asked.

Ernie experienced quite suddenly an immeasurable superiority to the head-porter.

"I am, Mr. Conklin."

"Without your wages?"

"I'll leave them to you, Mr. Conklin," said Ernie quietly. "They're the wages of sin. This place is a brothel. And your Christ is my Devil."

Leisurely, with a certain joy in his heart, and his bundle in his hand, he crossed the road to the Redoubt and climbed the motor-bus for Old Town.

As he did so the memory of a like journey with a companion at his side was strong upon him.

Somehow he had a feeling that Ruth would be on the top, awaiting him.

Standing on the steps he peeped warily.

She was not there; and his heart, that had been soaring, crashed to earth.

Then he climbed up into the bleak unsympathetic sky. All around him were benches empty, ugly, comfortless. And looking back, he was aware of Salvation Joe standing with arms folded across his scarlet paunch, eructating on the steps of the Hotel.

BOOK VI
THE QUEST

CHAPTER XLV

OLD MUS BOAM

ERNIE was not adventurous except where his heart was concerned.

He had the homing tendency of the affectionate nature.

When he left the Hohenzollern Hotel in Sea-gate he made straight as a bird for Old Town. But he did not go to Rectory Walk. He was out of work now, at the slack season of the year, too. He knew very well what his brother Alf's attitude towards him would be, and was by no means certain of his mother's: for she, too, worshipped success and efficiency in all men but the one dependent on her.

Therefore he went to an old school-fellow of his, married now, and established in the Moot at the back of the *Star,* and made arrangements to lodge with him.

His immediate future was secure, for he still had a pound or two in hand. And long ago he had adopted the outlook on life of the class which had absorbed him — an outlook natural to them, because inevitable, and acquired by him — the outlook that sees To-day but shuts its eyes to save itself from To-morrow.

Old Town is small and has long ears. It was soon known that Ernie Caspar was "out," and the cause of his dismissal was discussed by all and hinted at by not a few.

Alf, sitting behind his wheel at Mr. Trupp's door, was one of the first to note his brother hanging about the street-corner.

He reported the fact to his mother.

"He's back on us," he said briefly.

"Who is?"

"Ernie." He laughed bitterly as he chewed his cigarette. "Lost his job again and turned corner-boy. Takes his stand opposite the *Star* so everybody may know he's *my* brother."

Mrs. Caspar banged the pans upon the range.

"Why's he lost his job?" violently.

Alf lifted his hand to his mouth.

His mother eyed him, and Alf felt criticism in her stare.

"I see Joe Conklin, the head-porter at the Hotel," he said. "They give him one or two chances. But it was all no good. Never is with that sort."

Anne Caspar looked at him sharply.

"Are you tellin the tale, Alfred?"

Her son looked up fiercely.

"Why ain't he come home then? — Answer that."

"He did come home Saturday same as usual to take dad a walk."

"That's his cunning — to bluff you he wasn't out," jeered Alf. "He's lodging in Borough Lane. Has been ten days past. Mrs. Ticehurt told the Reverend Spink. If he done nothing he ain't ashamed of, why not come home?"

To do her justice, Anne Caspar was convinced against her will; but subsequent cogitation caused her to accept Alfred's story as true.

She felt that Ernie had deceived her. Why had he not told her that he was out when he came as usual on Saturday for his dad?

Yet in reality the answer was very simple. It was that Ernie chose to keep his troubles to himself.

Thereafter mother and son, by tacit consent, avoided each other in the steep streets of Old Town; and when Ernie called next Saturday he found the kitchen-door locked against him.

He was not surprised, nor indeed greatly grieved. His heart was high and very steady as he turned into his father's study. The winter had tried the old man, who was no longer now able to take the hill as formerly. Instead the pair dawdled along to Beech-hangar; and there, sitting among the tree-roots, under the fine web of winter beech-twigs, Ernie told his father the essential fact about his love.

"I've lost her, dad," he said in his simple way.

The old man's blue eyes, that seemed to brighten as his body dulled, shone on him mysteriously.

"Feel for her," he said, reaching out his hands like a blind man. "You'll find her." He added after a pause. "I don't think she's far."

Ernie chewed a grass-blade.

"I shall find her," he said with quiet confidence, "because my heart ain't fell down — and won't."

The old man was still blind and feeling.

"Spin," he said. "Then pounce."

Ernie nodded.

"That's it, and sooner or later my fly'll fall into the web."

"It must," said the other, "if you keep on spinning till you cover the uttermost parts of heaven and earth."

His father's words, as always, made a deep impression on Ernie's suggestible mind.

Ruth was not far: dad had said so; and dad knew.

Next day was Sunday. He determined to walk over the hill to Aldwoldston to see what he could find.

True, Madame at the Hotel had told him that the girl had not gone home; but did Madame know?

He started early, passed Moot Farm, where the turkey-cocks, stately and with spreading tails, played that they were peacocks, and disdained him for a vulgar fellow in spite of old acquaintance.

It was February, and the beeches in the coombe at the back of Ratton Hall had not yet begun to warm and colour with the rising sap. The feel of the turf beneath his feet, the glimpse of shrouded waters beyond the Seven Sisters, uplifted and inspired him as of old.

He could conquer; he could find.

Descending the long slope into Cuckmere, he crossed the road at the racing-stables, took the hill again, and marched along, his head in the sky, and a song on his lips, to greet that of the lark pouring down on him from the unbroken dimness of the heavens.

It was still early as he dropped down the bare bleak flank of Wind-hover, scrawled upon with gorse; and came over the cultivated foot-hills into the valley, bright with brooks and the narrow Ruther that winds like a silver slug down the green-way towards the sea.

He crossed the stream by a white hand-bridge, passed along an upraised path under an avenue of willows, across the open field called Parson's Tye; up the narrow chapel-lane between back-gardens and high walls, into Aldwoldston High Street, curling narrow as a defile between crowding houses, yellow-washed, brown-timbered, amber-tiled.

Conspicuous by its air of age and dignity stood out the *Lamb,* swarthy as the smugglers who once haunted it; a mass of black timber won, perhaps, from high-beaked galleons in Elizabethan days, with small projecting upper windows through the leaded panes of which eyes watched the street of old, while ears strained for the clatter of the hoofs of tub-laden pack-horses hard-driven from the Haven in the darks. A roof of Horsham slats bowed it to earth; while a huge red ship's figure-head, scarred and hideous as an ogre, propped with its dreadful bulk the corner of the street as it had done for the hundred and fifty years since the vessel of which it was the guardian and the god had been lured to destruction against the ghastly wall of the Seven Sisters. And the carvings, quaint and coloured, on the centre-board reminded Ernie that his father, when once of old their rambles had taken them thus far, had told him that the inn had been in days gone by a sanctuary under the jurisdiction of the Abbot of Battle and the next house of call after the *Star* at Beachbourne for pilgrims on their way from Pevensey to visit the shrine and relics of holy St. Richard-de-la-Wych at Chichester.

Just beyond the *Lamb* in the little market-square, filled almost by a solitary chestnut-tree, stood the Cross.

Around it, their backs against the brick pediment, gathered the village worthies as they and their fathers had gathered at that hour, under those skies, amid those hills, on Sabbath mornings for centuries innumerable. Standing round the four sides of it, men all, in Sunday negligé and easy attitudes, buttressing the Cross, they smoked and chewed and spat and ruminated. On the fringe of the centre-piece were groups of youths and boys, silent as their elders and as absorbed, whose age and worth did not yet entitle them to a place among the buttresses. No women or girls joined the sacred circle. These stood in the doors of their houses

round the square, or sat on their doorsteps, or peeped through the low latticed windows of the *Smugglers' House* at their masters expectorating round the Cross.

But for a little white terrier, curled on the pediment at his owner's back, who bit his flank with furious zeal, Ernie could have believed that here was a group of rustic statuary set up appropriately to embody the spirit of the place.

A twinkle lurking in his eyes, he asked the most ancient of the buttresses the way to Mr. Boam's cottage.

Very slowly the group stirred to life with grunts, groans, and a shuffling of feet.

Then the ancient one removed his pipe, and, after a preliminary exercise, spoke.

"Old Mus Boam, t' chapel-maaster," he said. "Down River Lane yarnder. Frogs' Hall in t' Brooks. I expagt yo'll find he a-settin on his bricks. Most generally doos o Sunday. For why? Ca'an't get no furderer dese day, I rack'n. Ate up with rheumatiz, he am. Ca'an't goo to Chapel. So Chapel has to goo to he! — he! — he! ——" A jest clearly almost as old as the toothless one who made it.

Ernie dropped down River Lane into the valley again. Just behind the willows at the foot of the lane stood a yellow-washed cottage, with a high-pitched roof like a truncated spire.

Sheltering the door from the sea-winds was a fine bay-tree, and in front of the house a little space of bricks on which sat an old man looking out across the stream towards Wind-hover's bare dun flank, pale in the wintry sun.

He, too, seemed pale and wintry, sitting there, one big hand on his ash-stick: a beautiful old fellow, very tall and sparse, his ruffled beard curling stubbornly up from beneath his chin towards the long shaven upper lip that added severity to his natural dignity.

There was no question where Ruth got her stature or her bearing from, if her colouring was all her own.

Ernie felt awkward in the presence of the still old man, but he introduced himself shyly as one who had been in service with Ruth at the Hotel.

Mus Boam eyed him keenly, kindly, but with obvious reserve.

"She'll ha left there now, I expagd," he said briefly, and called —"Mother!"

A woman came to the door. She was big, too, with the warm skin of her daughter, and the same distinguished foreign air. Her hair was snow-white, her eye-brows black, her eyes and colouring of the South. Surely she was descended from some Spanish adventurer who had made of Ruther Haven a base for raids up the valley into the Weald. But England, it was clear, and Sussex in particular, had impressed their staid and ponderous selves upon the riotous foreign blood to the exclusion of all else. A gypsy queen, the mother of Madonnas, bred among the Baptists and saturated with their faith, there was about her the same atmosphere of large and quiet strength that characterized her man. And Ernie could well understand that the pair had taught chapel, as Ruth had once told him, for thirty years in the building at the back.

Mrs. Boam stood in the door and looked at the visitor.

He noticed at once about her the same cloud of reserve that he had remarked in her husband.

She was clearly too well-bred to show hostility, but equally clearly she was exercising restraint.

"She'll ha gone into service," she said in deep and humming voice, like an echo of her daughter's, but somewhat dulled and flat with wear.

"In Beachbourne?" asked Ernie.

"Of course we doosn't see her as often as we used when she was at the Hotel. D'idn't to be expected, surely," said the mother parrying.

"And it bein winter and all," continued the old man, taking up the tale. "No coaches at this time o year. And dis a tidy traipse over the hill for a maid." He turned the conversation. "You'll ha walked, Mr., to judge from yer boots." . . .

Ernie trudged home over the greasy hills with certain clear impressions in his mind.

The old folk were anxious: they did not know where Ruth was: and they would not talk.

Was she writing?

Was she still in Beachbourne?

CHAPTER XLVI

ERNIE TURNS PHILOSOPHER

ERNIE was now steadily ablaze. His heart was set; his purpose resolved; there was no faltering in his faith. The armour in which his spirit was cased revealed no fissures under strain. He was amazed at his own strength, and at the illimitable resources on which he could draw at will.

People who saw him at this time, swept by the March winds, haggard and pinched at the *Star* corner, wondered at the flame of determination burning in his face.

"He seems always waiting for some one," said Elsie Pigott, who, like many another woman, was haunted by his wistful eyes at night.

"Perhaps he is," answered Mrs. Trupp.

It was the slackest season of the year — between Christmas and Easter; and there was no work obtainable. Building was held up by the frosts; visitors were sporadic; and in the East-end a strike of engineers in the great railway shops had dislocated trade.

Elsie Pigott pleaded with her husband for her favourite; but for once she could not tease or taunt the Manager of the Southdown Transport Company in acquiescence with her wishes.

"No," he said, sturdily, "if he wants my help he must come and ask for it. Last time I offered him a job he snubbed me brutally. I've got my self-respect same as others."

That evening she came to his door.

"Please, sir," she said, dropping a curtsey, "Mr. Ernest Caspar! — will you see him?"

He scowled at her over his *Christian Commonwealth*.

"You've done this," he said.

"No, sir," demurely bobbing. "He came."

"Show him in."

Ernie entered, shining and unshorn, a tatterdemalion with the face of a saint.

The old schoolmaster thought how like his father he was growing: the same untidy garden of flesh, the same spirit at work behind the weeds.

"Well," he said, laying down his paper, "I don't see much of you at chapel these days."

Ernie smiled.

"I'm in chapel all the time, sir," he said. "That's what I come about. I wanted you to know." He sat down suddenly. "You know what you used to tell me about prayer when I was a nipper. *Ask, and it shall be given you,* and that." He leaned forward. "That's true — every word of it. You can have what you want for the askin — if you'll wait. Now I want something; and I shall get it in time, because I'll be faithful."

Mr. Pigott looked into the rapt eager eyes of the scarecrow opposite him.

For some reason he felt humiliated, even afraid; and, man-like, he concealed his qualms behind an added gruffness.

"Your father's been talking to you," he said.

"Ah," said Ernie. "But I been talking to myself, too. No one else can't teach you, only yourself." He began to expound his philosophy with tapping finger in the half-hushed voice of the priest revealing the mysteries of life and death to the neophyte. "See there's two minds in Man," he began. "There's the Big Mind and the Little One. The Big Mind's like a Great Dream — it's beautiful, like clouds, but it can't do much by itself: the Little Mind's like a tintack, sharp and to the point. Now Alf's got the one kind of Mind, and me and Dad the other. This here Little Mind helps you to get on: it thinks it's on its own, being conceited. But the Big Mind behind does the real work." His eyes burned. He spoke with a solemnity, a conviction that was overwhelming.

Mr. Pigott was awed in spite of himself.

"The Little Mind's clever like Alf. And the Big Mind's wise like your father. That's it, is it?" he said lamely.

Ernie nodded.

"And what about Mr. Trupp?" the other inquired.

"Ah," said Ernie, with enthusiasm, "he's a great man, Mr. Trupp is. He lives by both Minds — as a full man should. He don't neglect neether. They're meant to work together. Ye see the Little Mind should be like a lantern for the Big Mind to work with — like a miner's lamp in the pit like. It's got no real life of its own — only what the miner chooses to give it. Most folks neglect one or the other. Dad and me neglect the Little Mind — so we don't do much; but we aren't afraid of nothin. Alf, now, he neglects the Big; so he's in fear of his life always, and good cause why, too. For he lives by the Little Mind. And sooner or later the Little Mind'll go out snuff. And then where'll Alf be?"

Elsie Pigott, in an apron, stood in the door.

"We're discussing prayer," her husband informed her.

"Indeed," said the lady. "And now you'll discuss a plate of beef. At least Ernie will."

The starveling rose.

"No, thank you, 'm," he said.

"Aren't you hungry then?" asked the young woman.

"Not as I'm aware of," laughed Ernie.

"Nonsense," the other answered, "you can live *by* the Spirit, but not *on* it." And she took him firmly by the arm and led him into the kitchen.

Her guest established, she returned to her husband.

"Have you found him a job, Samuel Pigott?" she asked.

"I have not, Elsie Pigott. Nor has he asked me for one."

"Mr. Pigott," his wife retorted, "if you were not twenty years my senior I should call you the beast you undoubtedly are."

All the same, when his wife had gone to bed that night, Mr. Pigott rang up the Hohenzollern Hotel and asked the Manager why Ernie had been dismissed.

"Got fighting drunk," replied the Manager. "He'd been warned before."

After that Mr. Pigott set his face like a flint.

"It's now or never," he admitted to Mr. Trupp, and added reluctantly, "There may be something in your Big Stick sometimes, after all."

CHAPTER XLVII

ALF TRIES TO HELP

ERNIE was now in a bad way materially.

He became seedy and slipshod, with hollow eyes, and clothes that hung loosely upon his diminishing frame.

Alf resented his presence and appearance as a personal injury.

"Does it to spite me, it's my belief," he told his mother furiously. "Always at the *Star* corner lookin like a scarecrow and askin for pity. A fair disgrace on the family. Of course all the folks want to know why I don't help him. What's the good of helping him? He's the sort the more you help the less he'll help himself. Help him downhill, as Reverend Spink says."

The thing became a scandal locally, and Anne Caspar shared something of the feeling of her younger son.

If Ern must starve, why do it at her door?

Happily her husband was, as always, blind to what was going on beneath his nose; and so long as he was not disturbed Anne could stifle any pangs of conscience that might trouble her.

Alf, on the other hand, had no pangs to stifle: for to the hardness of the egoist he added the mercilessness of the degenerate. His mental attitude towards the weak was that of the lower animals towards the wounded of their kind. He wanted them out of the way. Indeed, but for his ever-present sense of the Man in Blue at the corner of the street he would have dealt with Ernie, dragging a broken wing, as the maimed rook is dealt with by its mates.

He eased himself, however, and took characteristic revenge on his brother for the spiritual wrongs that the needy can inflict upon the prosperous by direct action.

At a meeting of the Church of England Men's Society in Old Town, he asked in laboured words and with obvious

emotion for the prayers of those present for "a dear one who had gone astrye"; squeezing his eyes and contorting his features in a fashion that led certain ladies of the congregation of St. Michael to whisper among themselves that Mr. Caspar was a very earnest young man.

Even in the C.E.M.S. Alf had few friends and some enemies; and Ernie heard from one of these — whom a sense of duty had compelled to speak — what had passed at the meeting in the Church-room.

Ernie accordingly stopped his brother in the street next day. He looked white and dangerous. Alf knew that look and halted. His heart, too, brought up with a jolt, and then began to patter furiously.

"What's all this, then?" began Ernie, breathing heavily through his nose.

"What's what?"

"At the Men's Society last night. Can't do nothing to help your brother. . . ."

Alf held up a deprecatory hand.

"You don't know what you're talkin about, Ernest," he said solemnly. "I'm doin more for you nor what you know."

Ernie came closer. There was in his eyes a surprising flash and glitter as of steel suddenly unsheathed; and he was kneading his hands. Ern's "punch" had been famous in certain circles in Old Town long before he went into the Army.

Now Alf had a spot upon his soul. He, too, possessed a weakness of a sort that Civilization in its kindest mood covers except in times of extraordinary and brutal stress.

"I know *just* what you're doing for me, Alf," said Ernie quietly. "Let's have no more of it, see, or I'll bloody well bash you!"

There was no question that Ernie meant what he said. Easy-going though he was, all his life he had been subject to these sudden eruptions which flooded the sunny and somnolent landscape with white-hot lava; as his brother knew to his cost of old.

Alf put his hand up as though he had been already bashed.

"Ow!" he gasped, "Ow!" and passed on swiftly.

That evening he went, as was very proper, to see and consult his spiritual director.

The origin of the Reverend Spink was known to few. He was in reality the son of a Nonconformist grocer in the North, and had been educated with a view to the ministry. His mother had been a governess, a fact of which her son at the outset of his career was perhaps unduly proud; though later in life, when referring to it, he would say with quite unnecessary ferocity, "And I'm not ashamed of it, eether."

After his father's death the superior attraction of what his mother truly called "the church of the gentry" seduced him from his old-time allegiance. With the aid of the local Bishop he was sent to a Theological College, and shortly received what he was fond of naming in militarist moments, "a commission" in the Established Church.

He did not like his brother-curates to have been public-schoolmen, and, when asked, would say that he himself had been educated privately. The Archdeacon, who was *not* jealous of him, spoke of him to those of his staff he considered on his own social level as "dear brother Spink." On the rare occasions when the Lady Augusta Willcocks asked him to supper, he oiled his hair before the great event and prayed fervently for guidance at his bed-side.

He was a small man, plump and rather puffy, who wore pince-nez, was spruce in his person, and walked about in a brisk, rather bustling way, as though he could not afford to lose a minute if all the souls waiting for him to save them were to be gathered in.

He and Alf were of much the same class if of somewhat different calibre. It was, indeed, from a close observation and imitation of the facial activities of the Reverend Spink at devotion that Alf had been enabled to win the benedictions of the virgins of St. Michael's.

Alf now called on his friend and pitched his tale.

"Past ope," he said lugubriously. "I'm sorry to say it of any man, let alone me own blood brother. But it's my true belief all the same."

"To man, my dear friend," said the Reverend Spink, rising heavenward on his toes with a splendid smile, "much is impossible. Not so to Go-urd."

Alf looked into the fire very religiously. Then he nodded his head and said after an impressive pause,

"I believe you, sir." He lifted his face with a frankness the curate thought beautiful. "Of course I ain't told you all I know about our Ern," he said. "After all, he *is* me own brother. And, as I often says, blood is thickerer nor what water is."

It was some months later that Alf swaggered into his mother's kitchen late one night.

The knowing look upon his face was mingled with one of obvious relief.

He sat down before the fire and smiled secretively. Once he sighed, and then chuckled till his mother's attention was attracted.

"What is it?" she asked.

Alf nodded his great head.

"Ah," he said. "He'll be easier now, you'll see. That's all. *She's* left."

His mother, who was stirring something in a saucepan, looked up.

"Who's left?"

"Her Ern got into trouble with."

Anne Caspar ceased to stir.

"What's that?" she asked sharply.

Alf smirked as he stared into the fire.

"One of the flash-girls from the Hotel. I see her off to-day for Mr. Trupp."

Anne Caspar was breathing deep.

"Was Mr. Trupp seeing to her?"

"That's it," said Alf. "Sea View. You know."

Yes, Anne Caspar knew all about Sea View.

"Was that why Ernie left the Hotel?" she asked at last, white as a sword.

"Ah," said Alf, significantly. "It was one why, I reck'n."

Anne Caspar was not critical nor logical nor even just.

Next Saturday, when Ern called to take his father out, his mother met him with terrible hostility.

"She won't come on you now," she said with a white sneer. "You needn't worry no more."

Ernie was taken aback.

"Who won't come on me?" he asked.

"That girl you got into trouble."

Ern turned ghastly. His mother's eyes held his face with cruel tenacity, although she was trembling.

"She's gone away to London," Anne continued,—"with her child."

Ernie threw back his head with a little hoary smile.

"Ah," he said, "Alf," and went out slowly.

His mother's voice pursued him, dreadful in its caressing cruelty.

"I shan't tell dad," she said.

It was not often Ernie drew his sword. Now he knew no mercy.

"You can," he retorted. "He won't believe you."

CHAPTER XLVIII

TWO MEETINGS

AFTER thirty years of following the wagon, Colonel Lewknor and his wife had returned home from India on a pittance of a pension.

There was a grandson now, and that grandson had to be sent to Eton like his father and his grandfather before him. Mrs. Lewknor was determined upon that. But the grandson's father was only a Captain in the Indian Army; ways and means had to be found; and openings are not many in modern life for a retired couple on the wrong side of fifty.

Then the Colonel's health became uncertain, and he was sent down to Trupp of Beachbourne.

While there Mrs. Lewknor caught influenza, and Mr. Trupp attended both.

A delightful intimacy sprang up between the three. The Colonel's sardonic humour and detached outlook upon life appealed to the great surgeon almost as much as did Mrs. Lewknor's experience and width of view to his wife.

Mr. Trupp attended his patients once a day for a fortnight.

When he paid his last visit, Mrs. Lewknor thanked him and asked him for his account.

"I'll see," answered Mr. Trupp. "What are you going to do when you leave here?"

"Go back to London and look out for a job, I suppose."

Mr. Trupp shook his head.

"The Colonel mustn't go back to London," he said. "Why not stay here and find your job here?"

He expounded his pet plan, cherished faithfully for years, of an Open-Air Hostel for his tuberculous patients.

"There's a site available in Coombe-in-the-Cliff," he said,

"just at the back. Build a Home. I'll fill it for you. You'll make a lot of money."

Mrs. Lewknor was thrilled at the project. It was at least a great adventure; and, coming of the lion-hearted race that conquered Canaan, she had no fears.

The Colonel, it is true, was more tempered in his enthusiasm, but then, as he was fond of saying,

"I haven't the courage of a louse. No man has."

And he was content to stand aside, as often before, and watch his wife's audacities with admiration not untinged with irony.

She took a tiny house in Holywell for herself and her husband, set out to raise money with which to buy the site in Coombe-in-the-Cliff, and sat down in earnest to work out the scheme in co-operation with the inspirer of it.

Her visits to Old Town to consult Mr. Trupp were almost daily. In fine weather she would walk across the Golf Links; and when the turf was like a soaped sponge she would go round by the road through Beech-hangar.

Here one bitter April afternoon she marked a tall bowed old man walking dreamily under the beech-trees, the light falling through the fine net-work of twigs on his uplifted face. His hands were behind him, and he wore an old-fashioned roomy tail-coat.

Mrs. Lewknor's swift feminine eyes took him in at a glance.

He was a gentleman; he lived out of the world; and there was somebody at home who cared for him: for it was clear that he was not the kind of man who would care for himself.

As she drew near, she glanced away, and yet confirmed her impression with that trick of the well-bred woman who somehow sees without looking.

Then, as she passed him, a wave of recognition overwhelmed her, and she stopped suddenly.

"Mr. Edward Caspar!" she cried.

He, too, had half turned.

"I was wondering if you'd remember me," he rumbled, beaming kindly down on the little lady through gold-rimmed spectacles. "You still walk as if you were dancing."

"Who am I?" she asked.

"I don't know," he answered. "Thirty years ago you were Rachel Solomons."

The profound spiritual affinity which had made itself felt in that unforgettable moment under the palms in Grosvenor Square long ago manifested itself instantly.

Time was not. Only two spirits were, who recognized the familiar beat of each other's wings in the dark spaces of Eternity.

She regarded him affectionately.

"How's it gone?" she asked.

"Not so bad, I suppose," he mused. "Better than I expected, if worse than I hoped. I'm dreaming still instead of doing."

"Any big things in your life?"

"One."

"A woman?" fearlessly.

"No. My son. And he was taken from me — for ever, I thought at the time. And after that I made the Discovery."

The little lady nodded.

"It's worth making," she said.

"Yes," replied the old man with the sudden leaping enthusiasm she remembered so well of old, and the same spreading flush, "and you don't make it till you've lost everything. That's the condition."

He had turned and was rambling along at her side, as if he had belonged to her for the thirty years in which they had not met.

They walked together thus down the New Road, along Rectory Walk, and turned into Church Street.

Anne Caspar from the bedroom-window saw them pass and wondered.

They were not talking: Anne was glad of that. Her Ned was ambling along, apparently unaware of the little lady, strong as she was fine, walking at his side.

The pair turned down the hill at Billing's Corner.

It was afternoon, and the street was almost empty save for a shabby man walking up the hill towards them from the *Star*.

They did not see him, absorbed more in themselves than in each other; but he saw them and stepped into the porch of the parish-church as though to avoid them.

Just opposite the porch Edward Caspar came to himself and said good-bye with grunts.

Mrs. Lewknor looked after his heavy figure toiling laboriously up the hill.

Then her eyes caught the eyes peeping at her from the porch — eyes that possessed the same wistful quality as those of the man who had just left her side: eyes somehow familiar that were smiling at her.

"Why, Caspar!" she cried, and crossed the road.

The man left the beam against which he was leaning, and came towards her suddenly. There was a curious wan smile upon his face. He lurched, held out his hand like a child for help, and fell his length in the road.

A man from the iron-monger's shop opposite came out.

"He's out of work," he said. "He's half-starved. There's a lot the same. Funny world."

Mrs. Lewknor was horrified.

"Take him into the porch," she cried, "out of the road. He'll be run over here."

"No, not into the church!" came an authoritative voice. "I know the man. The church is a sacred edifice."

It was the Archdeacon. He bent his somewhat dandiacal figure elaborately, put his nose close to Ernie's lips, and sniffed deliberately.

"No, sir, it's not that," said the iron-monger shortly. "It's food he wants."

"Ah," said the Archdeacon, rising in gaitered majesty, his painful duty done. "I'm glad to heah it."

Mrs. Lewknor was trembling with fury.

Ernie, on his back in the mud, stirred and opened his eyes.

He saw wavering faces all about him.

"Guess I'm all right now," he said.

"Give him air!" ordered the Archdeacon magnificently. "Ayah, I say!" and he made a sweeping gesture with his arm to brush away the crowd who were not there.

"He's had plenty of air," retorted Mrs. Lewknor with the curt brutality that distinguished her on rare occasions.

"What he wants is something more solid than he gets from the pulpit."

The Archdeacon eyed her *de-haut-en-bas*. From his undergraduate days he had believed implicitly in the power of his eye to master and demoralize his enemies and those of his Church, and the Lady Augusta Willcocks had loyally fostered his belief.

Now, however, his antagonist refused to be demoralized.

He saw that she was a lady, suspected that she might be "somebody," and with that fine flair for the things of this world which characterize the successful of his profession, he retired on gaitered legs with a somewhat theatrical dignity.

Ernie was helped to his feet.

A car, coming slowly down the hill, ground to a halt.

Mr. Trupp leaned out and took in the scene.

"Ernie, get up alongside your brother, will you?" he said. "Mrs. Lewknor!"

The car rolled on its way with its two new occupants.

"He don't want me," muttered Mr. Trupp in his companion's ear. "He wants my cook."

Mrs. Lewknor, still seething, recorded the incident.

"The Church is *the* limit," she snapped. "I could have pushed that man over in the mud."

"Yes," said Mr. Trupp soothingly. "But you mustn't take the Church too seriously. The right way to look on it is as rather a bad joke."

That evening, after his coffee, Mr. Trupp laid down his evening paper and stared long into the fire as his manner was.

His wife and daughter waited for the word that was slowly brewing.

It came in time.

"Men grow when they've got to," he announced at last with humorous sententiousness.

"They can't grow much without food," said Bess with warmth. The incident of the afternoon had stirred her generous young soul to the deeps. "It's monstrous!"

"It is," her father agreed. "And it's all because Civiliza-

tion has thrown up a class that's above the Discipline it imposes upon others."

Mrs. Trupp eyed her husband sternly.

"William Trupp!" she said, "I believe you're a Socialist."

"My dear," he answered, "I've been told that before."

"Bess and I don't want to hear your viewy views," continued the lady. "We want to talk about flesh-and-blood Ernie and how to help him."

"Hear! hear!" said Bess.

"My dears," replied the annoying man, "it's just Ernie I'm talking about. He's growing again. My old friend Necessity's at work on him once more."

CHAPTER XLIX

ALF MARKS TIME

THE scene outside the parish-church in Old Town, when Mrs. Lewknor challenged the Archdeacon, marked the turn in Ernie's material fortunes.

The Reverend Spink handed on *his* version of the affair to Mr. Pigott at the Relief Committee that evening.

"He was laying on his face in the road *dead* drunk opposite the church-door when his brother picked him up," he reported, round-eyed and spectacled. "His poor, *poor* people!"

"Ah," said Mr. Pigott, "was he?—I know where you got *that* story from."

The curate tried to be rude in his turn, but he was not so good at it as the more experienced man.

"Such a place to choose!" he continued, turning to Colonel Lewknor. "Opposite the church-door! Just like him!"

"Such a place, indeed!" echoed the Colonel, quiet and courteous. "What's the good of lying down to die of starvation at the door of the *Church* of all places? Will *she* open to you?"

Mr. Pigott disliked the Reverend Spink almost as much as he disliked the curate's protégé. Next day the contrary man sent for Ernie and offered him a job as lorry-man in the Transport Company.

"I know you and you know me," he said in his most aggressive manner. "So it's no good telling a pack o lies to each other that I can see. Start at twenty-three a week, with chances of a rise if you keep at it steady. Begin Monday. . . . And it's your last chance, mind!"

Ernie ignored the insults and leapt at the offer.

The Southdown Transport Company ran motor-lorries between Newhaven and Beachbourne, carrying seaborne coal and other merchandise from the harbour on the Ouse to the town under Beau-nez.

Ernie liked the work.

It kept him out of doors, under the sky, and in touch with the old-world elemental things he loved. The breath and bustle of the harbour at Newhaven; the long ride on the motor-lorry through the hill-country at all seasons of the year; even the pleasant acrid smell of the coal and coke in the lorry and on his overalls was pleasant and satisfying to him.

He worked steadily, paid his debts, and for the first time in his life began gradually to save money.

That autumn his father asked him if he wouldn't return home to live.

"Alfred's left us," said the old man.

"Has he?" asked Ernie surprised. "Where's he gone then?"

"He's gone to live above his garage," replied the other. "Something's happening to Alfred," he added. "I don't know what."

Alf, in fact, was changing; and Mr. Trupp was watching the evolution of his chauffeur with a detached scientific interest that his wife defined as inhuman.

And that evolution was proceeding apace. Alf was living alone above his garage; he had introduced a girl into his office; and he was no longer getting on.

Mr. Trupp noted the last as far the most significant symptom of the three.

Alf had climbed in his career to a certain point, and there he stuck fast. His business neither went ahead nor back. He was still doing well and saving money. The wonder was that he was not doing better.

But the reason was clear enough to the penetrating eye of the old surgeon, to whom his chauffeur was an absorbing study in mental pathology: Alf was no more a man of one idea; his energies were no longer concentrated solely on getting on to the exclusion of all else. The emotional side of him, battered down from infancy, was revenging itself at

last. Desperately it was seeking an outlet, no matter how perverted: certainly it would find one.

"He's suffering from life-long repression," the Doctor told his wife. "Now he's got to find a safety-valve."

In his own mind Mr. Trupp had no doubt as to the form the safety-valve would take.

About that time Mrs. Trupp, meeting Mr. Pigott in the Moot, asked him how his new hand was getting on.

"Working steady as Old Time," replied the other with satisfaction.

"I like the look upon his face," Mrs. Trupp remarked. "He's always expecting."

"Yes," replied the old school-master, "expecting angels — like his father."

"Perhaps he'll find them," smiled Mrs. Trupp.

That evening, as it chanced, she met her godson under the elms in Saffrons Croft, and stopped him.

It was May now. The hope illuminating air and sky and every living thing was reflected in Ernie's face. Indeed the young man looked inspired.

The two regarded each other affectionately.

"Ernie," said the lady, colouring faintly.

"Yes, 'm."

"Are you still thinking of that girl you told me about?"

The other's face glowed like the moon.

"I never hardly think of nothing else, 'm."

"I knew you were," answered Mrs. Trupp. She added with a sudden lovely smile: "You'll find her — if you're faithful."

"That's what dad keeps on, 'm," Ernie answered. "And I *know* I shall too. See, I keep all the while a-drawin her to me." He made the motion of one hauling on a line. "She can't escape me — not nohows."

He turned on her the earnest eyes of the evangelist, and began to wag an impressive finger in the way she loved.

"See, you can draw down what you want — *only you must want it with all your heart.* 'Taint no good without that. Alf, now, he draws down money. For why? — that's what he wants. Now I want something else."

The lady regarded him with wise shrewd interest.

This New Thought, as the foolish called it, how old it was, how universal, how deeply embedded in the primitive consciousness of the common man! Ernie, to be sure, did not read Edward Carpenter nor the works of any of that school; but instinct and experience had led him to knock at the same door.

"And if Alf wanted something different, too?" she asked.

Ernie shook a sceptical head.

"He wouldn't — not really. That ain't Alf. Money's what Alf wants and what he gets by consequence. He's only for himself, Alf is. If he went out a'ter anything else he'd only go half-hearted like, therefore he wouldn't get it. He'd be a house divided against hissalf. So he'd fall."

The two brothers now rarely met and never spoke.

Just sometimes Ernie in his grimy overall, sitting with arms crossed and sooty face upon a load of coal in the jolting lorry, would be passed by Alf at the wheel of his thirty horse-power car, stealing by without an effort or a sound, swift as the wind, silent as the tide.

On these occasions Ernie, perched aloft on his load, would detect the smirk on his brother's face, and knew that Alf was feeling his own superiority and hoping that Ernie felt it too.

In those days Ernie learned to know the corner of England in the triangle between Lewes, the Seven Sisters, and Beau-nez as he had never known it before. And the closer grew his intimacy the greater became his love.

The quiet, the strength, the noble rounded comeliness of the hills reminded him of the woman he sought. True, she disturbed him, present or absent; while they, in act or retrospect, comforted. But their full round breasts, rising clean and clear before him, stubble-crowned, green, purple, or golden against the blue, gave him a sense of earth rooted in the immensity of spirit and washed by the winds of heaven as did nothing else he knew but the woman he had lost.

"Wish I were a poet," he sometimes said to his father. "To put it all down what I feel, so others could see it too."

"Perhaps you are," his father replied.

And certainly if to be a poet is to love the familiar objects

of the road, a poet Ernie was: for he loved them all — Lewes with its narrow streets, its steep hill to which you cling like a fly on a pane and look across to Mount Caburn for help; the old *Pelham Arms,* its walnut-tree at the back, the *Fox,* the *Barley Mow,* the *Newmarket* on the Brighton road; the hills running down in glorious nakedness to the highway, the tanned harvesters sitting among their sheaves; peeps of the blue Weald islanded with woods; and always accompanying him the long wall of the Downs, gloomy or gleaming, here smooth as the flanks of a race-horse, there scarred, grim, weather-worn and pocked, in winter dazzling white beneath the blue, ruddy in autumn sunsets, emerald in April days; and all the year gathering the shadows at evening in the Northward coombes to spill them over the expectant Weald like purple wine when the door of night had closed upon the sun.

The lorries to and from Newhaven always took their way through the valley of the Ruther. Once or twice in that winter, as they bumped down High'nd Over from Sea-foord into Aldwoldston at evening, Ernie was surprised to find the chocolate-bodied car lying apparently derelict in the roadway at the steep entrance to the village; and wondered if the surviving Miss Caryll who still lived in the Dower-house at the foot of the hill was ill.

And again one evening in the spring, as he jolted through the village-street, past the great chestnut lit with a thousand tapers in the market-square, he was aware of a man on a motor-bicycle pelting past him up the hill. The man wore motor-goggles; but there was no mistaking Alf, bowed over his handles, flashing past the *Lamb,* down the hill, and out of sight.

What was Alf doing at that hour of the evening on the road to Sea-foord?

BOOK VII
THE OUTCAST

CHAPTER L

THE CRUMBLES

NATURE'S punishments of her erring children are slow as they are sure.

If the inexorable Dame cannot forget, neither can she hurry.

Therefore the shock of realization that the wages of sin are death — as our fathers used to put it; or that weakness brings its own reward — as we should more prosaically say; because it comes gradually to the human consciousness, is mercifully numbed.

It was some time before Ruth faced the fact that she was in the toils, and that there was no escaping. When at length the dreadful dream had become a reality, and she was forced to acknowledge to herself the life she bore within her, it seemed to her for a moment that the worst was passed.

On the morrow of the night on which the hidden voice refused longer to be hushed, she went away by herself on to the Crumbles: that bird-haunted waste of stagnant pools and tussocky shingles which stretches along the edge of the Bay to Pevensey. There at least she would be sure of being alone save for a rare creature of the Wilderness, snipe or wild duck, hare or slow-winged heron. Half a mile from the great Hotel, rising sepulchre-wise from the surrounding desolation, her back to the town, and her face to the sea, she sat down on the lonely beach and girdled her knees with her arms.

It was a dull November afternoon.

The remorseless sea crawled like a serpent out of the gloom, curled an ugly lip at her as it reared to stare, then softly falling to the ground, scudded towards her with a hideous little hiss, to suck her down, the victim of its lust.

The dumb sky offered her no help. There was neither song nor sun. And back in the West, amassed under sig-

nificant gloom, lay the great camp of men, hostile now to her and hers, to which she must yet return.

Sitting thus by the scolding sea, her chin on her knees, she looked the situation in the sombre eyes.

It was terrible enough.

She had to pay the price every mothering woman must pay — disfigurement, pain, dependency, long-drawn physical disease, and, at the end of all, torment and possibly death: and in her case, added to the price Nature asks of those women who obey her laws, there was the penalty Man demands of those who violate his.

For her, and such as her, there is in Society, as at present organized, but one sure way of escape: and that way Ruth was too near to Nature, too healthy in mind and body, to contemplate save for a passing moment.

Her eyes travelled down her young figure, shapely yet.

"All right, my darling," she cooed. "*You* shan't suffer — not if it were ever so."

Her face was to the future. At whatever cost, she would be true to the trust imposed on her unsought.

Indeed, so sane was she and strong, that but for the old couple in the little yellow-washed cottage in the valley of the Ruther, who had taught Bible-class there for thirty years, she believed her fear would have been blotted out by the hope her baby, pushing through the crust of her terror like a crocus through the chill wintry earth into February sunshine, brought her.

For she recognized with a sob of bitterness that these brooding months, when her child, thrusting with tiny hands and inarticulate cries, was opening for her the Door of Escape into the Open Country that lies for each one of us outside the Prison that is Self, would have been the most beautiful in her life, if Humanity had blessed her for the sufferings she was enduring on its behalf, if Society had supported and pitied her when she had fallen into the trap that it had laid.

As things were, she was an outlaw, who would be stoned alike by men and women when it was discovered that an innocent indiscretion, prompted by a noble natural impulse, had flung her into the miry pit.

She turned and looked across the flats at her back to the great camp of men, crouching for their prey.

The Downs behind seemed to circle it as with a wall of dulled steel, making escape impossible; while over in the West was a murky glow as of damped-down furnaces, waiting to open their doors and pour down molten gloom on the City of the Plain.

Ruth rose up swiftly and returned to the Hotel.

Better even its unsympathetic walls than the naked desolation of the waste.

There, however, was no one to whom she could turn. Ernie was out of the question, while Madame had retired, as always at this season of the year, to the sister-hotel at Brussels.

Indeed in all Beachbourne with its hundred thousand inhabitants, its temples and tabernacles at every street corner, its innumerable white-collared priests and ministers, its sacrament-taking women, and reform-talking men, was there one soul to whom she could look in her distress?

Ruth prayed as she had never prayed before. Alone in the darkness on her knees, redeeming herself and mankind by her tears, she asked that the punishment for the mother's sin might not fall upon the child.

"On my head, O Lord, not hers," was the cry of her anguished heart.

Light came to her darkness.

There was one man in Beachbourne in whom she had detected, so she believed, the spirit of Love.

That man was Mr. Trupp, who had attended her Miss Caryll till she died.

Taking her courage in her hands one dark January evening, when she realized that her time at the Hotel was short, she stood on the steps of the Manor-house and rang.

"Why, you're quite a stranger, Ruth!" said the smiling maid.

"Could I see Mr. Trupp?" asked the girl.

"That I'm sure you can."

She was shown into the long consulting-room, and sat down, trembling, her eyes upon her knees.

She was staking her all upon a throw.

Mr. Trupp came in.

The young woman dressed in black, simply as a lady, rose.

"Who is it?" asked the surgeon, peering over his pince-nez.

"Ruth Boam, sir," the other answered. "Miss Caryll."

Mr. Trupp glanced at her. Then he put his hand upon her shoulder, and she knew that she was safe.

"Sit down," he said gently.

This large young creature, who had something of his own Bess about her, went straight to his heart in her trouble.

"Ruth," he said gravely. "May I send Mrs. Trupp to you?"

Ruth sobbed and nodded.

Very slowly Mr. Trupp climbed the stairs to his wife's room.

It was some time before Mrs. Trupp joined the girl.

The room was dark, save for one shaded lamp.

The lady came in quietly, dressed for the evening in a damson-coloured tea-gown that showed off her gracious beauty and silver hair. Her face was wan and wistful, her bearing noble and full of tender dignity.

The black figure on the chair did not move.

The elder woman took her seat beside the younger and laid her hand upon the girl's.

"Ruth," she said at last, in a still voice with a quiver running through it. "I know more than you think. You loved him, didn't you?"

The broken girl nodded; then shook her head.

"It's not that," she said. "It's not him. It's my baby. I couldn't abear she should be born in the Workhouse along of them."

To Mrs. Trupp the Workhouse system had been a nightmare ever since, as a young girl, she had first realized its existence and become dimly aware of the part it played in our imperial scheme. She believed that the institution which had its local seat in the old Cavalry Barracks at the back of Rectory Walk was no worse than others of its kind up and down the country. Sometimes she visited its wards and

nurseries with her old friend, Edward Caspar, and came away sick at heart and oppressed of spirit. More often, sitting in her garden, she listened to his quietly told stories of what he always called " our Cess-pool."

Mrs. Trupp stroked Ruth's hand.

" It shan't," she said, with the fierceness that sometimes surprised her friends. " You must trust us. Mr. Trupp'll see you through. But you must leave the Hotel at once. I'm going to send you to a house of mine in Sea-gate — now. I shall telephone for the car."

And half an hour later Ruth was sitting in the chocolate-bodied car that once before had carried her into the perilous Unknown.

CHAPTER LI

EVELYN TRUPP

EVELYN MORAY had been brought up in the Church; and, like most Englishwomen of her class and generation, she had as a girl looked to the Church to enable her to realize her ideals.

In her young days she and her neighbour of later life, Edward Caspar, had been of the little group of West-end people who had been drawn East by the couple who were making St. Jude's, Whitechapel, the home of real religion for more than the dwellers in the East-end. She would sometimes give a violin solo at the famous Worship Hour in the church off Commercial Street; while Edward Caspar would on rare occasions read Browning or Wordsworth there. The memory of those early days of dawning hopes served as a never-present bond between the pair when in later years chance caused them to pass their lives side by side in the little town on the hill under Beau-nez. And the religious development of each had followed much the same lines.

They had watched the fingers of love light a candle in the darkness of the late seventies and the early eighties, and . . .

"The candle went out," Edward Caspar would say. "Candles always do in the Church of England."

"Yet the light grows," his companion would answer.

"Assuredly," Edward would agree. "Everywhere but in the Churches."

Evelyn Moray's disillusionment had begun even before her marriage. For all her innocence she brought a singularly shrewd judgment to bear on the affairs of men. And if as she came to understand the truth, she suffered at first the pangs of betrayed love, she was too brave a spirit not to face the situation in its entirety. The noble words of the Order of Baptism — *manfully to fight under His banner*

against sin, the world, and the Devil — applied, she found, to a Church the outstanding characteristic of which was that it never fought at all. When she was bogged in a quagmire of doubt and despair, fearful of the new, more than dissatisfied by the old, Mr. Trupp had come into her life. His sane judgment, his wide experience, and broad philosophy, landed her once more on *terra firma*. In a time before the great Exodus from the Temples of Orthodoxy had assumed the proportions that we know to-day, she had left their gloomy portals to seek elsewhere that simple and direct service of mankind her spirit needed for its fulfilment.

Her father's death left her something of an heiress.

Forthwith she started a maternity home in a quiet street in Sea-gate for young women of the middle-class who had fallen victims of a Society which failed to protect them, to give them opportunity, to supply their honest needs.

The conditions of entry to the home were strict; and Mrs. Trupp never wilfully departed from them. Sometimes, it is true, she was taken in; often she was disappointed; but she persevered with the tenacity that is the inevitable outcome of continuous prayer.

She ran her home very quietly; and Mr. Trupp was, of course, her medical officer. But the Church, jealous of all trespassing within what it believed to be its own demesne, heard and objected.

"Making sin easy," said Lady Augusta Willcocks, who wore short hair and cultivated the downright manner which she believed to be characteristic of the English aristocracy.

She cherished a secret antipathy for "the doctor's wife," as in her more bitter moments she would describe her neighbour.

Lady Augusta was indeed of the world of Victoria and Disraeli, opulent, pushing, loud; Mrs. Trupp of an older, finer, more deliberate age. There was between the temper and tradition of the two ladies a gulf no convention could bridge. Lady Augusta felt and resented the fact.

Archdeacon Willcocks, on the other hand, reacted to the same stimulus in a different way. For him the fact that Mrs. Trupp was a Moray of Pole was paramount. And so — when Mr. Trupp had become famous — he hushed up his

wife and schemed to run Mrs. Trupp's home in connection with the Diocesan Magdalen League.

But Mrs. Trupp was not to be cajoled. She had her own way of doing things, and meant to stick to it.

"I think perhaps we'd better go on working for the same end in our rather different ways," she told the Archdeacon with that disarming courtesy of hers.

"Am I to understand that our way is not the Christian way?" asked the Archdeacon, smiling and satirical according to his wont, as he swayed his long thin body to and fro, serpent-wise.

"It may be," replied the lady, faintly ironical in her turn. "It's not quite mine."

"Pity," said the Archdeacon, mounting his favourite high horse with the little toss of his head, carefully cultivated, which so impressed the shop-keepers of Old Town. "I had hoped that you remained of the Faith, even if you have seen good to desert your Church."

The lady looked at him with eyes that were a little wistful, a little whimsical.

"I'm afraid we're mutually disappointed," she answered quietly.

CHAPTER LII

THE RETURN OF THE OUTCAST

IT was in Mrs. Trupp's home, in a back-water of the East-end, that Ruth's child was born.

The babe was beautiful, but over the mother a shadow lay.

"It's her people," Mr. Trupp told his wife. "She hasn't broken it to them yet."

"I know," Mrs. Trupp answered. "I must talk to her about it."

Ruth, curled in her bed, giving satisfaction to the babe in the hollow of her arm, showed every sign of distress when the other broached the topic.

"Will you trust me to tell them?" asked the lady gently.

Ruth raised her fine eyes, brimming with gratitude to the elder woman's face.

Mrs. Trupp went.

Before she started on her pilgrimage of love she passed an hour in the parish-church, which was her favourite resort in all the crises of her life.

There the Archdeacon came on her, to his surprise.

"I'm glad to see you here, Mrs. Trupp," he said with slight inevitable patronage.

"I'm often here," she answered, smiling.

"Ah," said the Archdeacon. "I've missed you."

She could not tell him that this was because she avoided the church when he and his fellow-priests were ministering there.

"I love the atmosphere," she said.

"Thank-you. It *is* nice, I think," he answered with a little bow; taking to himself, with childish ingenuousness, the

credit for the conditions that six centuries of prayer and worship had created.

An hour later Mrs. Trupp was face to face with Ruth's mother in the kitchen of Frogs' Hall.

Hard by, the church-bell tolled for evening service. Through the open window came the noise of homing rooks drifting up the valley from the Haven; and under the hedge on the far side the Brooks a cow bellowed.

It was Mrs. Boam who began.

"I allow you've come to tell me about our Ruth," she said at last.

"Have you heard anything?" asked Mrs. Trupp.

The other shook her head.

"We'd be the last to hear," she said. "That's sure. But I knaw there's been something. It's seven month since she's been anigh us. That's not our maid — our Ruth: so good and kind and considerate for her dad and me as she's always been."

"There has been something," answered Mrs. Trupp, and told her tale. . . .

The mother listened in silence, the tears streaming down her face, her hands upon her lap.

When the story was finished, she rose.

"Thank you kindly, 'm," she said. "If you'll excuse me I'll tell dad. He's in the back."

She went out, a big unwieldy woman, walking with the unconscious majesty of grief, and was absent some time.

Mrs. Trupp sat in the kitchen with a somnolent rust-coloured cat, and listened to the willows rustling by the stream and the voices of children playing by the bridge.

Once she went to the window and looked across the cattle-dotted Brooks to the long low foothill that raises a back like a bow, green now with young corn, against the bleak shaven flanks of old Wind-hover.

Then Reuben Boam entered, erect as a soldier, and with the face of a puritan and prophet.

Mrs. Trupp wondered, as she often had of late years, why the men of her own class never attained the dignity of the great amongst the simple poor.

She rose humiliated, conscious of her own spiritual inferi-

ority; and took his rough paw between her two delicate hands.

"Won't you sit down, Boam?" she suggested, quite modern enough to realize what a topsy-turvy world it was in which she should have to make such a request to an old man in his own home.

His long bare upper lip trembled and nibbled as he spoke.

"She's a good maid," he said huskily —"our Ruth. The Mistus says it were a gentleman. It's hard for a working girl to stand up agen a gentleman that's set on despoilin her. But in my day gentlemen were gentlemen and kept emselves accardin. They tell me it's different now. Accounts for the bit o bitterness, hap." The great hand lying in hers twitched. "She must come back home soon so ever she can move. There's not much. But we'll make out somehow. Rebecca must goo to her. She'll need her mother now. They was always very close — mother and daughter."

The old woman entered, tying her bonnet-strings beneath her chin.

"Yes, I'll take carrier's cart to Ratton. Then I can walk to the Decoy and take train to the East-end."

"Won't you come with me?" said Mrs. Trupp. "I've got the car in the Tye." . . .

She dropped her companion at the door of the house in Sea-gate, and herself took a tram home. When Mrs. Boam emerged from the house an hour later a car was still at the door.

The old lady looked about her, a little bustled.

"Could you tell me the way to the tram?" she asked the chauffeur.

He touched his hat and smiled.

If Alf had a soft spot in his heart, it was for old women.

"This is your tram, ma," he said, and helped her in.

A fortnight later the same car stood at the same door, when Ruth emerged, her baby in her arms.

It was dusk, and she did not see the chauffeur, who leaned out towards her.

"Would you come up in front alongside me?" he said. "I put your box inside."

Ruth obeyed.

They drove through the gathering shadows in the sweet-scented June evening, past Ratton and Polefax, all along the foot of the Downs, the Wilmington Giant with his great staff gleaming wan and ogre-like on the hillside, and at the Turn-pike, just where the spire of B'rick church is seen pricking out of trees, turned for the gap and ran down the valley towards the Haven.

A sea-wind with a sparkle in it blowing up the Brooks seemed to meet the softer breezes of the Weald and penetrate them. A young moon hung over the sharp crest of Wind-hover.

Ruth, her baby in her arms, picked up familiar objects as they swung by: the long-backed barn on the left, the little red pillar-box on the wall, and occasionally the glimmer of a light in one of the homesteads among trees across the stream. On her right, unhedged cornlands swept away in a rustling sea towards the foot of the Downs which made a bulwark of darkness against the firmament; while on the near rise a row of stacks, like immense bee-hives, stood sentinel under the stars.

The car slid down a hill and up again. The valley lay naked alongside them now, cattle moving darkly in the moonlight and the tower of the church upon the hill black against the night in front.

The chauffeur took out his clutch. The car was running so noiselessly that Ruth could hear the ghostly stir and murmur of the willows that line the river-bank and cover the feet of the village with a green girdle.

"You don't remember me then?" said the man beside her.

They were the first words he had spoken.

Ruth glanced at the face beside her own, smooth and smiling in the moon, and clutched her baby to her so fiercely that it gave a little cry.

"Ah," said Alf, "I thought you would then."

The impression he had made seemed to please and satisfy him. He put his engine into gear, and was soon running through the village-street.

At the foot of the hill, where a group of mighty elms on

a high bank guard the seaward entrance to the village, he turned sharply to the left under a row of pollarded poplars, and bumped over Parson's Tye quiet in the moonlight, the church four-square among its trees upon the mound on the right.

Then he drew up by the stile leading into the Brooks.

Ruth descended swiftly, and her babe lying like a snow-drift in her arms, disappeared in the darkness through the stile.

Alf waited beside his car, watching the river like a snake crawling and curling away in gleams of sudden silver under stark trees into the night.

A few minutes later the bulk of a big woman in a white apron appeared at the stile.

"Could you take the box in?" said a gentle voice. "Dad's crippled."

Alf swaggered.

"Very well. This once. To oblige."

The job accomplished, he looked round the little plain kitchen with a proprietary air.

"Nice little place," he said.

"Would you take a cup of tea?" asked Mrs. Boam.

Ruth had disappeared.

"No'w, thank you," said Alf in his cockiest manner. "I dare say you'll see me round here again next time I'm this way."

CHAPTER LIII

THE FIND

IT was rather more than a year later.

Ernie, in grimy overall strapped over his waistcoat, and grey shirt without a tie, was climbing the lower slopes of High-'nd-Over from Sea-foord in an empty lorry.

Beneath him lay the Haven, buttressed by a gleam of white cliff, the Old River blue-winding to the sea at Exeat, and the New laid like a sword-blade across the curves of the Old.

The lorry bumped over the crest of the hill, austere and bare even in the sunshine, the sea broad-shining at its back, and dropped down out of the brilliant bleakness into the best wooded of the river-valleys that pierce the South Downs.

It was Saturday evening early in July.

There had been a fierce and prolonged drought. In the Brooks all along the banks of the slug-like stream the hay had already been carried fine in quality and light in weight. On the sun-burnt foothills a belated farmer was working overtime to carry the last load before Sunday. The long blue wain proceeded in lurches across the hill-side to the guttural exhortations of the wagoner, all about it a little busy knot of men and women raking and pitching.

Ernie sat with his back to the hill, his arms folded, looking across the valley to the tiny hamlets clustered round a spire, the huge black barns and clumps of wood beyond the stream, and the deep hedges running caterpillar-wise up the flank of the opposing Down.

The air was still keen and sparkling, yet full of scents rising from the fields that looked save in the Brooks brown for once and parched instead of fresh and green as of wont after being shorn of their crop.

Ernie enjoyed those scents. There was nothing like them in the East, he remembered. Was there indeed anywhere outside of England?

The lorry ran past the Dower-house in its rich old garden, the grey-shingled spire of the church opening to view at the back of the village across Parson's Tye.

They rattled under the elms at the foot of the hill and up the steep street, where the same brown spaniel lay always in the same place asking to be run over.

A jumble of houses pressed in upon them. Sudden dormer-windows peeped from unexpected roofs. Chimney-stacks would have tumbled on them but for the brilliant creeper that bound their old bricks together. While in odd corners behind the high brick path tall hollyhocks bowed as they passed.

The High Street was fuller than usual. Labourers slouched along it, tired and contented. A wain, with a pole at each corner pointing to heaven, the carter with patched corduroys and long whip plodding at the head of his team, was carrying a party of haymakers home. Under the great chestnut in the market-square a group of dusty horses stood, the sweat drying on them. Wages had been paid — the best wages of the year too: for all had worked overtime; Sunday was ahead of man and woman and beast alike; the most strenuous weeks of the year were over, and the most quiet to come.

The lorry ran swiftly down the hill, out of the village.

At the spot where a lane runs off to Littlington, it swerved suddenly to the right. Ernie, sitting on the rail, swayed over the side to look.

They were passing a girl, walking soberly along, her back to the village. Clearly she had just come from the fields, for she wore an orange-coloured turban wisped about her black hair, a long loose earth-coloured gabardine, stained with toil, and short enough to disclose the heavy boots of the agricultural worker.

She was a big young woman, broad of shoulder, large of limb, who walked in spite of her heavy foot-wear with an easy rhythm that caused Ernie's heart to leap.

The lorry flashed by.

The girl did not look up, marching steadfastly forward,

careless of the passing vehicle; but Ernie caught a glimpse of her profile.

In a moment he was on his feet.

The lorry was travelling fast. Ernie tapped at the partition which divided the body of the car from the driver, and peered through the glass.

The man at the wheel heard, but shook a grim head. He did not mean to stop. Home and beer and the week-end rest lay before him.

Ernie, far too impetuous to think, did not hesitate.

He jumped at the road, fleeting swiftly away beneath him.

It rose up like a careering wave and struck him viciously.

Whether he fell on his feet, his hands and knees, or his back, he never afterwards knew.

That he was shocked into unconsciousness is clear, and that his body continued its ordinary functions unconcerned and guided he knew not by what mysterious power.

He woke, as it were, still jarred from shock, and aching throughout him, to find himself steadily tramping along a road.

The objective world surged in on him. He put up his hand to ward off the huge green seas that came lolloping along to overwhelm him.

Riding the charging billows were a host of immense black ogres, dreadful in their impassivity, and with blind eyes, who yet had seen him and were set on his destruction.

Then he resumed himself. The billows were the hills; the careering ogres the row of bee-hive stacks dumped peacefully on the rise upon his right.

He could not have been unconscious many minutes, for the sun still hung on the crest of the hill much where he had seen it last; but he was walking along the road on which he had fallen and must so have walked during his unconsciousness, seeing that he was now perhaps a quarter of a mile from the spot where he had jumped, and proceeding in the opposite direction to that in which the lorry had been travelling. His face was towards the sea and the village through which he had recently passed, his back to the Weald.

On his left was a wood, darkened by firs. A dusty motor-bicycle lay up against the bank.

Ernie was aware of the machine, as one is aware of something in a book. It was not real to him: he was not real to himself. Indeed he was conscious of one thing only: that some power was guiding him and bidding him keep quiet.

He did not attempt to take control. His brain, except as a mirror which reflected passing objects, was passive; and he was content that this should be so.

Dimly he wondered if he was dead. Then he realized that the question had no interest for him, and he retired once more into the No Man's Land of the hypnoidal state.

A villager was approaching.

He saw the man marching towards him as on the screen of a cinema.

The man said good evening.

Ernie answered, and found himself listening with interest to his own voice. It sounded so loud and alien.

He was a puppet in a play, watching his own performance — actor and audience in one.

Except for a certain diffused physical discomfort on the remote circumference of his being, he was not happy or unhappy. He was a headache, and that was all he was. But he was a headache which could walk and if necessary talk.

Then, still obeying his unseen guide, he turned off the dusty road into the wood upon his left that stretched across the Brooks down towards the stream.

On the fringe of the wood he was bidden to stay. . . .

The river ran in front of him a few yards away. On the other bank, immediately opposite him, was a clump of willows. There too was a big young woman in a tan overall.

She was sitting on the tow-path, her back against a tree, her arms bound about her knees, her feet in heavy boots pressed close together in an attitude expressing doggedness. She was bare-headed; and her orange turban lay at her feet. Ernie marked her gypsy colouring, red and gold, and the yellow necklace that bound her throat. The sullen expression of her face was enhanced by the gleam of teeth which her lips, drawn back almost to a snarl, revealed.

Here surely was a tigress, trapped and resentful.

Above her stood a little man in the shining black gaiters and great goggles of a chauffeur.

He was talking and smiling. The young woman sat beneath him, her tense arms binding her knees, her eyes down.

But this was not the usual drama when the Serpent and the Woman meet. Here the Serpent was taunting Eve, not tempting her. So much her face betrayed.

Ernie watched the picture-play with absorbed interest. A great while ago he had known both actor and actress intimately, and still took an impersonal interest in them and their doings.

Then the little man's voice came to him across the stream, sharp and strident. He had a peculiar swaggering motion of the head and shoulders as he spoke, truculent yet furtive, that Ernie knew well; and all the time his eyes were wandering uneasily about the Brooks, searching for enemies.

"You'll ask me to marry you next!" he sneered. *"ME marry YOU!"*

The young woman rose, ominous and passionate. She stood in her tan-coloured gabardine, like some noble barbarian at bay, a creature of the earth and elements, yet conquering them.

She seemed to tower above the little man, and in her hand was the orange turban like a sling that swung heavily to and fro.

Ernie watched the scene with fascinated eyes, and, most of all, that bright slow-swinging thing that sagged so dreadfully.

The little man watched its pendulum-like action too. He did not seem to like the curious slow swing of it, or the look upon the face of the swinger, for he withdrew a pace or two.

"Any more of it," said the girl, her voice deep and vibrating, "and I'll tell Mr. Trupp."

The name struck Ernie's subconsciousness with the disturbing effect of a pebble dropped into a still pool. Ripples spread over the torpid surface of his mind, rousing it in ever-growing circles to life. The view was dissolving with extraordinary speed. It remained the same and yet was entirely changed. The play was becoming real. . . .

The little man was now walking swiftly away along the tow-path. Suddenly he turned and came back a pace or two, his hand out.

The woman had not stirred. She stood bare-headed on the river-bank, one foot on a twisted root, one knee bent.

"Give me back my letter," said the man. "And I'll let it go at that."

She met him squarely.

"That I wun't then!"

The little man hesitated and then turned about.

Ernie came to himself with a pop, as a man comes to the surface after long submersion in the deeps.

CHAPTER LIV

THE BROOKS

RUTH was standing on the bank opposite him, but she had turned her back upon him and the river.

He saw the heave of her shoulders, and the motion of her head, and knew that she was weeping.

In a second he had flung himself into the water and was wading towards her.

She turned at the sound of his surging, expecting fresh enemies, and prepared for them.

He stood in mid-stream, a picturesque and dishevelled figure, grimy with coal-dust, collarless, touzle-headed, his greasy overall braced above his waistcoat.

"Ruth!" he called uncertainly.

She stood on the bank among the willows and looked down on him.

He ducked his face in the stream, and washed away the coal-dust.

"Now d'ye know me?" he grinned.

Her face glowed.

"I knew you without that, Ernie," she answered, her voice deep and humming, as of old, like an inspired silver-top.

He surged towards her with wide arms amid the water-weeds.

She stretched out a strong hand to help him up.

He took it, and kissed the fine fingers.

In another moment he was standing at her side.

"O, Ernie!" she said, and passed her hand across her forehead. "Seems like you was sent."

He gathered her in his arms. Her eyes were closed; her face, wan now beneath the warm colouring, tilted back. He marked the perfect round, full and very large, of her sheathed pupils. Then in her ear he whispered,

" Ruth, will you marry me? "

She shook her head, the tears welling from under closed lids. Then she withdrew quietly from his arms.

" I couldn't do that, Ernie," she said.

He absorbed her with his eyes. Her gabardine, smocked at the breast, shewed the noble lines of her bosom, fuller and firmer than of old. It was open at the neck and revealed the amber necklace bound about a throat that was round and massive as a pillar, and touched to olive by the sun.

Alf was walking away towards the bridge which threw a red-brick span across the stream some hundreds of yards distant. Cows moved in the meadow. One came towards him along the tow-path, lowing in the dusk.

Alf stopped and watched it. He did not like cows: he did not like animals. " Machines are my line," he would say. " More sense in em." The cow, unaware of the disturbance she was causing in the other's breast, mooned forward. That was enough for Alf. On his right was a plank-bridge carelessly flung across the stream. Alf did not like plank-bridges either, but he preferred them to cows. And placed as he now was between the Devil and the Deep Sea, he chose the Deep Sea without a moment's hesitation, because he knew that here at least the Sea was fairly shallow.

He crossed the plank-bridge — on his hands and knees. The pair under the willow watched in silence with an awed curiosity.

" He's frit," murmured Ruth, the light and laughter peeping through her clouds.

" He's always frit, Alf is," Ernie answered out of the experience of thirty years.

" Alfs always is," commented Ruth.

Alf, the astounding, the perils of land and sea behind him, now rose from his humiliating position, and well knowing he had been watched, waved with the stupid bravado that is a form of self-defence towards the willow clump.

Then he disappeared into the wood. In another moment the swift thud-thud-thud of a motor-bike starting up was heard.

Ruth listened.

" He ain't coming back," said Ern comfortably.

"Ah," Ruth answered, unconvinced. "You don't know him. You don't know Alfs." She put out her hand towards him in that brave and gracious way of hers. "I'm glad you come though, Ern," she said.

Ernie's eyes filled with tears, as he caught her fingers.

"There!" he said. "He couldn't hurt you. He ain't no account, Alf ain't."

She answered soberly.

"No, he couldn't hurt *me* — not my body leastways. But I was like to ha killed *him*."

A little breeze stirred the willows. The turban on the ground flapped and fluttered like a winged bird. Then it opened suddenly and discovered a jagged flint, wrapped in its folds. Ruth took it out and tossed it into the stream.

"It aren't pretty, I knaw," she said. "But life is life; and Alfs are Alfs; and you never knaw."

He escorted her across the Brooks to the road, moving leisurely behind her in the dusk, his shoulder mumbling hers.

On the bridge she said good-bye.

He was outraged.

"Im going home with you!" he cried.

"I'd liefer not, if you please, Ernie," she said, gently insistent. "Not through the village, Sadaday night and all."

"Very well," he answered reluctantly. "To-morrow then. A bit afoor cock-crow."

BOOK VIII

TREASURE TROVE

CHAPTER LV

THE POOL

ERNIE was up and away early next morning.

It was Sunday; and there was nobody about except the few hurrying to early service in the parish-church. Amongst these he noted Alf turning into the porch.

At Billing's Corner he met the Archdeacon, who passed him with disapproving eye, and the sour remark,

"You're off early, Caspar."

"Yes, sir," brightly. "I'm away over the hill."

"Ah," smirked the Archdeacon, "there *are* better ways of passing the Sabbath, I believe."

"Yes, sir," answered Ernie. "You'll find Alf awaitin you inside. He's doin it for us both."

The Archdeacon had never quite made up his mind whether Ernie was ingenuous or impertinent or both. But then he had never made up his mind about Ernie's father, though he had disliked his impalpable neighbour and feared him secretly for thirty years.

Ernie now turned into Rectory Walk, and paused outside No. 60.

The habits of the inmates he knew to a minute, and had timed himself accordingly.

His mother would be in the kitchen, preparing breakfast in her blue wrapper, while his father would be dressing.

Standing in the tiny square of garden among the tall tobacco plants, he tossed a cautious pebble through the upper window which was open.

"Dad!" he called, low.

The old man, spectacled, but collarless, in all the purity of a clean Sunday shirt, thrust out a touzled head.

"Found her," whispered Ernie.

His father nodded down benevolently. Then there

sparkled in his eyes that remote and frosty twinkle which was the outward and visible sign of the change that had been wrought in him.

"And finding's keeping," he said.

In the glorious morning Ernie took the hill, marching through the gorse to the song of larks. On the one hand the Weald lay spread beneath him like a green lagoon, dimming to blue; and on the other the great waters rose up to meet and mingle with the greater sky.

It was still early when he dropped down kestrel-haunted Wind-hover, over the corn-covered foothills, into the Brooks.

A white hand-bridge on red girders crossed the stream just under the mound on which stood the short-backed cathedral church with its thick-set tower, half-hidden by ash and sycamore.

On the bridge Ernie paused and looked across towards the village lying in the morning sunlight, a tumble of russet roofs hugger-mugger among gardens on the hill, the old brown tiles crudely patched here and there with raw red ones; beyond the roofs the bare Downs; and at the foot of the hill, just across the green, tiny Frogs' Hall with the honeysuckle about the door, and Mus Boam sitting as always on his bricks, spectacles on nose, and Book spread on his knees.

Then Ernie was aware of a movement in the water underneath him and glanced down. Just beside the bridge a willow leaned over the stream.

Here in a pool, sheltered by bridge and tree, a young woman stood, her skirts kilted, and the water to her knees.

She wore the same orange scarf as on the previous evening, and the same earth-coloured gabardine; but her arms were bare; and in them was a naked babe.

Standing amid water-weeds, the stream glancing in the sunshine about her, and the lights and shadows dappling her face as the willow above her stirred, she dipped the child and cooed, and dipped and cooed again, while the babe kicked and flung its arms and laughed.

Beyond the stream heifers, black and red and white, moved leisurely in the flat green water-meadow or flicked their tails

in the shadow of the straggling hedge that divided the Brooks from the long foot-hill, of the form and colour of a rainbow, which curved against the background of smooth Windhover.

Ernie, on the bridge, himself unseen, watched the young woman, with contented eyes.

Happy in her motherhood, Ruth had clearly forgotten for the moment her troubles and her tragedy.

Quietly Ernie moved off the bridge and took his stand beside the willow on the bank.

Ruth saw him now, smiled a casual greeting, and continued her labours.

Suffering, it was clear, had crushed all self-consciousness out of her. She knew no shyness, no false shame; performing her natural functions simple as a creature of the Wilderness.

Then she came wading towards him, her baby wet and slippery in her arms. The sun had burnt her a rich olive hue, deepening the red in her cheek, touching her throat to gold. With her orange turban crowning her swarthy hair she looked a gypsy Juno.

More massive than of old, matured in face and figure, she was a woman now and not a girl: one who had fought and suffered and endured, and bore on her body the stigmata of her ordeal. There was no laughter in her, and no trace of coquetry. Almost austere, nobly indifferent, she was facing life without fear and with little hope.

Ernie was shy and self-conscious as she was the reverse.

"You don't go to the Lock then?" he said stupidly.

"Nay," Ruth answered. "The Lock's for the lads. This'n's for baby and me. More loo like."

"She seems to favour it," said Ernie.

"Aye, she's unaccountable fond of the water, same as her mother." Her speech had taken once again the tone of her village environment.

The young mother sat down on the bank, and turning the child face down, began to stroke her back with strong caressing rhythmical sweep.

Ernie, watching, was amazed at the skill and easy masterfulness of her motions.

"Who learned you that?" he asked.

"Seems to coom like," she answered. "I doos it most days in general."

"She likes that," said Ernie wisely, watching the squirming rogue.

"Doosn't do her no harm anyways," answered the mother.

She put the little naked thing to sprawl and crawl and scramble on the grass beside her.

"Sun and wind and water," she said. "Give a child them three; and she wun't need for no'hun else — only food. That's what Mr. Trupp says. And I reck'n he says right."

Standing up, the water still covering her feet, she dropped her skirt.

He gave her his hand to help her on to the bank.

"The sun's burnt you," he remarked.

"Aye," she answered. "I been in the hay these three weeks past. We've carried all now, only Pook's Pasture."

Her humming voice soothed and satisfied him as of old. He listened to it as to a familiar song heard again after many years. He did not catch the words of the song, nor care to. It was the air and its associations that held his heart. Then he woke from his dream to find the woman at his side saying:

"I shall wait over harvest. I promised Mr. Gander that. See I work good as a man. Better'n some, hap," with a gleam of the old Ruth and a little backward toss of the head. "Then I shall goo."

Ernie roused swiftly.

"Where'll you goo then?"

"Back to service."

Ernie was staggered.

"And what about her?" nodding at the baby gurgling and squirming in the grass.

Ruth answered nothing, but her face stiffened.

He felt in her the fierce and formidable power he had felt on the previous evening beside the stream.

Here was not the Ruth he had known. Nature had roused in the mother forces, beautiful but terrible, of which the maid had not been conscious.

She stood with high head, like a roused stag, looking across the water-meadows to the foothills.

Then her chest began to heave.

"There's not enough," she said deeply. "I been home more'n a twal month now. Dad's got the pension, and there's what the Squire allows him and the cottage; and I doos the milkin at the Barton and earns well at whiles in the hay and harvest. But 'taren't enough. We can't make out — not the four of us and a growin child. I must just goo back to service. I made the mistake, and I must pay — not them."

Ernie came closer.

"No, you won't," he said masterfully. "You'll marry me."

She shook her head, swallowing her tears. Then she laid her hand upon his arm.

"Thank-you, Ernie," she said. "I just can't do that."

"Why not then?" fiercely.

"Ern," she panted, "if I married any I'd marry you. But I'll marry no'hun now."

She sat down under the willow and began to dress her babe.

Ern stood above her, dogged and determined.

"Say! why can't you marry me then?" he persisted.

As though in answer she dandled the child. Then she lifted her face to his, and in her eyes there was the flash and challenge of a love so fierce that Ernie felt himself suddenly afraid.

"I doosn't regret it," she said. "Never! — I'd goo through it all again for her sake and glad. She's worth it — every dimple of her!" And she laid her lips upon the child's with a passion that was almost terrible.

"You done no wrong, whoever did," mumbled Ernie, awed still by this eruption of reality. "'Twarn't no fault o yours — or hers for the matter of that."

Ruth rose and tossed her baby over her shoulder with an easy careless motion that frightened Ernie as much as it thrilled him. The child lying now face down, and doubled like a sack, sucked her thumb and regarded him with the blue eyes of her father.

Together they walked across the field towards the yellow-daubed cottage with the steep brown roof and mass of honey-

suckle over the door, standing with its back to the tumbled houses on the hill behind.

"Mind, Ruth. I won't take no," insisted Ernie. "You need protection. A young woman like you do."

"Never!" said Ruth.

Ernie, unconscious of his companion's irony, ploughed on his ox-like way.

"You don't know what men are," he continued.

Her brown eyes flashed, and then dwelt on him with wistful humour.

"I should," she said. "This last two year and all," she added with solemn bitterness. "I knaw now why girls go down. They makes one mistake, then the Alfs get em. And when the Alfs get em they're done. They're like stoats, Alfs are; and we're the rabbits. Hunt you down, jump on you, and then suck the blood out of your brain. Often I've seen em at it in the hawth."

"Alf!" cried Ernie, his blood a maelstrom within him.

He tried to halt, but she marched on.

"What's he been doin to you?" hoarsely pursuing.

She answered painfully.

"You knaw yesterday?"

"Yes."

There was a harsh, almost cruel note in his voice.

She turned on him, anger and laughter battling in her eyes. Then she saw a look upon his face, dark, sullen, and suffering, such as she had never seen there before.

"I done no wrong, Ern," she said. "No need to be that savage wi me."

He became quiet; and she resumed.

"He's been goin on at me a year now — tryin to get me."

"Does he want to marry you?"

Ruth drew back her upper lip till the teeth gleamed white. She looked splendidly scornful.

"Marry me!" she sneered. "That isn't Alf. He wants me — for his sport. Alfs don't marry — not the likes o' me anyways. That ties em down. They want the pleasure, but they won't pay the price."

They had reached Frogs' Hall, mounted the high step, and entered.

Ruth put the child to bed, and then rejoined Ernie in the kitchen.

"Tell the rest," said Ernie. He was white and dogged.

Again she gave him battle with her eyes; and again marked the look upon his face and relented.

"Last week he wrote. Asked me to meet him in the willow-clump by the Lock at sun-down. I thought best goo and have it out with him. It's been goin on over a year now."

"Wasn't you afraid?" asked Ernie in awe and admiration.

"Afraid of him?" she scoffed, and stripped her arm that was smooth as marble, thick as a cable, and sinuous as a snake. "I can load against the men in the hay. You ask Mus Gander. And I knaw Alf." . . .

An envelope was in her hand.

"Here's the latter."

She gave it him.

It was undated, and typewritten, and torn, but on the top there was still left enough of the heading to be decipherable — *Caspar's Garage, Saffrons Croft, Beachbourne.*

The letter contained an assignation, an indecent suggestion, and a threat; and it was signed *Little Cock Robin.*

A small fire spluttered in the grate.

Ernie flung the letter on to it, and held it down in the flame with vicious heel.

Ruth was on her knees in a moment, trying to rescue the charred fragments.

"Eh, but you shouldn't ha done that, Ernie!" she cried.

"Why not then?" flashed the other. "Hell's filth, flame's food."

Ruth rose, her attempt at salvage having failed.

"Ah," she said, "you're simple. You doosn't knaw men. You think they're all same as you. I've learned other. There's a kind of man who when he's got the sway over you there's only one way with him."

"And what's that?"

"Get the sway over him."

He looked at her sternly and with devouring eyes.

"Has Alf got the sway over you?"

She was stirred and tumultuous, the chords of her being swept by a mighty wind.

"He thinks he has," she panted. "That's one why I'm gooin into service — to get away."

"You could never leave the child!" cried Ernie.

"It's just her I'm thinking of."

He came closer.

"I claim her!" he cried passionately. "I've a right to her — and to her mother too."

She smiled at him wistfully.

"Ah, you think you're strong!"

"Aye, I'm strong enough when I like. Trouble with me is I don't often like."

She shook her head; but he felt the resistance dying out of her.

"Goo away now, Ernie!" she pleaded, choking. "Don't tempt a poor girl! There's a dear lad!"

"I'll goo away if you'll think it over."

"I'll think it over — if you'll goo away."

She threw up her head.

Beneath her eyelids the tears welled down.

He drew her to him: his lips were close to hers; his eyes on hers.

Gently she disengaged.

"Nay, lad, you mustn't," she said. "I must just reap where I've sown, as the old Book says, and make amends as best I can. No need to drag down all I love along o me." She added on that new note which thrilled him so strangely, "Not as I regrets my child. Never!"

CHAPTER LVI

FROGS' HALL

IT was just about the time of Ernie's discovery of Ruth that Mrs. Trupp announced firmly to her husband one evening, *à propos* of nothing in particular,

"I shall tell him where she is now."

"She mustn't be let down again," grunted Mr. Trupp, who was devoted to Ruth.

"Ernie won't let her down," answered Mrs. Trupp with bright confidence. "He's an absolute gentleman. All the Beauregards are."

"Alf, for instance," commented the curmudgeon across the hearth.

"So that's *that*," continued the lady with the emphasis of one who scents opposition. "She wants help; and he wants her. And he's been true to her for a year and a half now. That's a long time in that class," she went on with fine inconsistency. "So *that's* settled."

"Pity," grumbled the recalcitrant. "He's doing nicely now, Pigott tells me — and will so long as he doesn't get what he wants. If she marries him she'll make him happy and comfortable. She's just the sort of woman who would. And he'll go to pieces at once. There's nothing to muck a man's career like a happy marriage."

Mrs. Trupp looked severely at the wicked man over her spectacles.

"It's lucky *your* marriage has proved such a failure, William Trupp," she said.

The other drank his coffee and licked his lips.

"What's done can't be undone, my dear," he grinned. "Bess, ask your mother to give me another cup of cawfee."

Mrs. Trupp had no need to send for Ernie after all. For he called, and sitting in the dusk of the great French-

windowed drawing-room in the very chair in which eighteen months before he had told of his loss, he told now of his treasure trove.

There was no reserve or concealment between the two. What one did not know of the story the other could add. They were friends, intimates, made one by their common feeling for a woman who had suffered and endured.

"One thing I knaw," said Ernie deeply. "*She* didn't commit adultery, whoever did."

Mrs. Trupp, as often, wondered at and was made ashamed by the direct and spiritual insight of a rough-handed working man.

"She loved him," said Ernie. "That's just all about it. Didn't know what he was, no more than a lamb knows what a tiger is till he's got her."

"She's a good woman," responded Mrs. Trupp soberly; and added on a note, half-mischievous, half-cautious, not a little provocative—"I wonder if she'll have you."

Whatever fears for the outcome of his enterprise Mrs. Trupp might entertain, Ernie himself had none.

Indeed for so diffident a man he was astonishingly confident in a quiet way; and besieged his lady with a conquering sense of victory that would brook no doubt and little delay.

Every Sunday morning found him crossing the white bridge at Aldwoldston; and many a week-day evening saw him in Frogs' Hall.

It took him just an hour to trundle an ancient bicycle, lent by Mr. Pigott, from Billing's Corner to the Market Cross after his day's work was done; and an hour back, with the moon hanging over Wind-hover and the night-jars purring in the woods under the northern escarpment of the Downs. But he was young; the August evenings were long-drawn and full of scents and the cries of partridges; and the hour he spent with Ruth in the Brooks, strolling along the tow-path under the pollarded willows to the sound of rooks homing and high-strewn in the heaven, was worth the toil.

The time was between the hay and the straw; and Ruth, apart from her milking at the Barton, was not pressed with work.

She liked his visits, and looked for them; but she drew no

nearer to him, nor ever invited him to come. Friendly always, even affectionate, she kept between them a cloud, impalpable and impenetrable. At the end of a month he knew that he was no closer to his goal than when he had met her first upon the river-bank.

The old folks grew to love the constant visitor, nor did he disguise the errand on which he was bent; while little Alice, with her father's eyes peeping from beneath her mother's curls, greeted her new friend with screams of joy, bangings on her drum, and the loveliest and most intimate of smiles.

Ernie made the child a cradle-swing of willow-withes, hung it from the bough of an apple-tree, in the garden, and passed many a happy hour alone with her.

One evening Ruth, returning from the Dower-house, her yoke upon her shoulders, found him in the garden on the hill at the back of the cottage, swinging the child and singing.

She bent her knees and lowered her milk-cans to the ground. The clanking of the cans on the stone caught Ernie's ears. He turned from his labour of love to see Ruth standing in the door in her earth-coloured gabardine.

She smiled at him; and in her eyes there was the gleam, mysterious and darkling, with which good men are sometimes blessed by their women.

Ernie bent over the cradle.

"Who'm I, baby?" he asked.

The little singing voice from the basket-cradle made answer sweetly in one brief bubble-word.

Ruth heard it, put her hand to her heart, and turned slowly away, the chains of the yoke upon her shoulders jingling faintly.

Ernie came to her.

"You mustn't, Ernie," she murmured.

"I must then," he whispered in her ear, "my dear love — my lady."

His arm stole about her; but she put it aside, and regarded him with eyes that were great and grieved under the evening sky.

"Ernie," she said in her gently thrilling voice. "Goo away, there's a dear lad — afoor worse comes of it. You can't help me; and I might harm you."

He took her hands in his, and kissed them.

A working-man in speech, in habit, and in garb, he made love always as a Beauregard. Indeed in the great moments of his life it was always one of those pale chivalrous gentlemen who stood out amid the motley and tumultuous concourse of the forbears who thronged his path.

"But you *can* help me, Ruth," he told her. "I got my weakness. I dare say you've heard tell."

For the first time the girl in her, long hidden, peeped out at him, shy yet shrewd.

"I remember what they used to say at the Hotel," she answered, with the overwhelming simplicity of the pure in heart.

"You can help me conquer that," he urged. "No one else can, only you."

She said nothing, but gazed at him with new eyes, sweet and very grave, that seemed to sum him up.

At last he had moved her. Swift and sensitive almost as was she, he saw it instantly; and with the profound wisdom of the true lover said no more.

CHAPTER LVII

THE SURPRISE

A FEW evenings later, he dropped off the lorry in the market-square, determined to pay Ruth a surprise visit two hours before his time, and walk home over Wind-hover afterwards.

He ran down River Lane at the back of the slaughter-house, grinning to himself. At the bottom of the lane a group of young willows bending plume-like over the wall at the corner ambushed him from Frogs' Hall. Covered thus he approached the cottage on tip-toe with the grins, the conspicuous elbow-work and elaborate stealth of the happy conspirator.

Ruth would have put the babe to bed. He would surprise her alone.

Frogs' Hall stood on a bank a foot or two above the Brooks to lift it over the winter floods and high leap-tides. Two windows only, one above the other, looked out over the river. Ernie peeped from his ambush. The lower window was open; and a voice came through it.

The voice was not that of Ruth, nor of her father or mother, but it was strangely familiar.

"You don't want me," it was urging. "Very well. So be it. And I don't want to do you no harm. Why should I? — I shan't tell no one what I know. Only you must give me back that letter in exchange. Fair is fair. See, we've both made mistakes, you and me. That's the short of it. But there's no reason any one should know if you'll only be sensible."

Ernie heard Ruth's answer, low and passionate.

"I wun't give it you then! — I'll hold it over you. Then I'll know I got you safe. Show it your Church friends and Mrs. Trupp and all."

Alf laughed harshly.

"Think it over, my lass," he said. "I'll call again in a day or two. I *can* twist your tail, and I will if you want."

He came out of the low-browed door, his eyes down, a thwarted look upon his face. It was not till he had descended the steps into the Brooks that he was aware of the man standing against the bunch of willows on his left.

He turned about with a grunt and made off in the direction of Parson's Tye.

A few yards away he turned again and came back swiftly, his eyes down, and face troubled.

"Say, Ernie!" he began.

Ernie, under the tossing willow-plumes, awaited him coldly.

Alf seemed to feel that he had run up against the wall of the other's hostility. He stopped short, turned abruptly once more, and bustled away, jerking a handful of words over his shoulder.

"All right," he said. "Have it your own way. Only don't blame me. That's all. But there *is* a law in the land."

Ernie stood with folded arms, and watched his brother across the Tye and out of sight.

Then thoughtfully he mounted the steps of the cottage, knocked at the door, and entered the kitchen.

Ruth sat by the fire, staring into it, on her face that formidable look of an animal driven to bay he had before remarked.

He stood in the door and watched her.

"Ruth," he said at last.

Her profile was to him, her hands bound about her knees. She did not stir, but she was aware of his presence.

"He ain't got nothing against you, Alf ain't?" Ernie continued.

His face was wrung, his voice thick and unnatural.

Ruth rose slowly; slowly she came to him, and put both hands on his shoulders.

She lifted her face, and it was blind and quivering.

"O, Ernie!" she cried. "It was him drove me that day."

Ernie smiled, in his relief his hands clasping her elbows, his eyes dwelling on her twittering lids.

" I knaw'd that then," he answered broadly.

She opened her eyes on him swiftly, and stared aghast.

" Did you? " she panted. " How? "

" I saw ye."

She huddled closer to him, and laid her head upon his shoulder as though to hide her face.

" Where did you see me? " she whispered.

" At the Decoy. East Gate. That afternoon."

Suddenly she drooped, and seemed to hang about him. He put his arms about her; otherwise she would surely have fallen.

He sank into a chair; and it was some while before she gathered herself and rose.

One hand on the mantel-piece, she stood gazing into the fire, panting.

" Alf's the only one as knows who *he* was — only you and Madame," she said at last. " And you're safe." She lifted her eyes to his and continued appealingly. " He done me wrong, Ernie. But he's her father all said. And I wouldn't for worlds any harm come to him through me. He *was* mine one time o day, tany rate. And I must protect him, best I can."

" He can protect himself, I reck'n," said Ernie bitterly. " Don't ardly need you to see to him, I reck'n."

She looked up swiftly.

" It'd wreck his career if it was known. They'd bowl him out of the Army surely."

" Who told you that? " asked Ernie.

For a fraction of a second she hesitated.

" He did," she said: and instantly saw her mistake.

Ernie rose, slow and white.

" Does he write then still? "

She felt the storms beating about her, and her bosom heaved.

" Only that once," she answered at length and lamely.

Ernie came pressing in on her with ruthless determination.

" May I see the letter? "

She flashed up at him with astonishing ferocity.

"No," and added heavily —"It's burnt."

She was clearly fencing with him; clearly not telling all the truth. He did not blame her. But he felt that helplessness, that irritation, of the male whose bull-headed rush is baffled by the woman's weapon, imponderable as air, elusive as twilight, soft and blinding as a fog; the weapons she has wrought in self-defence upon the anvil of her necessities through the immemorial ages of her evolution.

"He asked you to burn it, I suppose?" said Ernie bitterly.

Her bosom heaved. She did not answer him.

"Ah," continued Ernie remorselessly. "He knew you. Took advantage to the end."

Ernie was troubled for the moment by the incident, but the emotion it aroused in him was pity rather than anger.

Ruth had deceived him, he was sure. He did not believe that Royal had written her a letter. So skilled an adventurer, so expert a cad, would be little likely to commit himself on paper in such a matter. That ten-pound note had wound up the incident for him.

But the shifts to which a girl in Ruth's position must inevitably be driven seemed to him excusable, even in this case, admirable. Royal had betrayed and deserted her; and she repaid his treachery by a steadfastness beyond words.

With the capacity of true love, he made beauty out of an obvious blemish.

Here was a woman indeed! — Here was a lover!

Quietly he persevered.

CHAPTER LVIII

THE DOWER-HOUSE

WHEN his father asked him how the chase went, Ernie answered with a grin,

"She hangs back a bit, dad. I spun and I pounced. What next?"

"Spin again," said the old man. "First the web; then the fly; and last the cocoon."

Ernie chuckled. Lying on the hillside amid the gorse and scrub he had often watched the spider at his work. The method was exactly as described by his father. The hunter spun his web and then retired to an ambush to wait. When the prey was caught and the wires brought the message to the citadel, he pounced. Next with incredible speed he wrapped his victim round in silk till it was but a swathed mummy to be absorbed at leisure.

"It's what I am a-doin, dad," said Ernie, and continued to wind his silken meshes about his prey; while others aided in the pleasant conspiracy.

One August afternoon Mrs. Trupp, after calling at the Dower-house, looked in at Frogs' Hall.

The little river ran like a white riband across the Brooks under shaggy willows tossing silvery tails. A flotilla of ducks came down the stream and landed quacking under the white bridge clumsily to climb the bank and waddle towards Parson's Tye. On the lower slopes of Wind-hover the corn still stood in sheaves, the stubble ruddy in the sunset on the bow-backed foothill across the stream.

Ruth sat and listened to her friend; on her face the perturbed look of the good woman genuinely determined to do what is right and honestly puzzled as to her course.

"Don't you love him, Ruth?" asked the other. "Is that the trouble?"

The young woman was deeply moved.

"I've left my heart behind me," she said. "I shall never love a man again — not like that. All that's left of me has gone to the child."

"Ruth," said the elder woman, "d'you know that most of the successful marriages I know are based on friendship? It's very few who pull off the Big Thing. And those that do often come to grief. They expect too much, and are disappointed."

She found herself, as always, talking to Ruth as she would have done to a girl of her own kind. There was no sense of class or caste between the two. They met simply on the ground of common humanity.

"Aye, I could be his friend," said Ruth slowly. "And more than his friend. There's none like Ernie. I'd give him all I got to give. That's a sure thing. I'd be that grateful to him and all."

"And there's little Alice," continued Mrs. Trupp.

"That's just it," cried Ruth passionately. "It's little Alice is all I think on. It's that makes me afear'd — lest I should be unfair to Ernie. See, I *do* love Ernie. You ca'an't help it. He's that good and unselfish. And I wouldn't hurt him for all the world — not if it was ever so."

"He's the kind of man who needs a woman to help him along the way," said Mrs. Trupp.

Ruth peeped at the other warily, even a thought jealously. What did she know of Ernie's weakness? For Ruth, if she was not in love with Ernie, felt for him that profound protective sense which the mother-woman invariably feels for a man who has shown himself dependent on her.

"Cerdainly it aren't as if he were one of the ambitious ones," she mused. "Cerdainly not. All for himself and gettin to de top, no matter about no one else."

"Like his brother," said Mrs. Trupp crisply.

"Aye," Ruth agreed, "like Alf. That's where it is. Both brothers want me, only they want me different. Alf thought I was his for the askin. Because I made my mistake he thought I was anybody's wench — to be had for money. That's where the difference lays atween him and Ernie. You could trust Ernie anywheres, a woman could."

"And that's the whole battle from the woman's point of view," said Mrs. Trupp, rising. "To trust your man. To know that, wherever he is and whatever he's doing, he won't let you down."

After her visitor had left, Ruth took the child and walked up River Lane to the butcher's at the top.

Marching thoughtfully between high walls, she met Miss Eldred, the daughter of a neighbouring Vicar.

Miss Eldred was an austere and lonely young woman, with a reputation for learning and advanced views, who took no part in the church life of the locality, and was even said to be a rationalist.

She and Ruth had known each other from childhood, and had always been somewhat antipathetic.

As the young woman coming down the lane saw the young woman coming up it, babe perched on shoulder, her lavender-grey eyes, remote and almost smouldering, kindled suddenly. The veil fell from before her face, and the spirit behind the clouds shone forth in wistful radiance.

She stopped.

"Ruth," she said in her staccato voice, "I envy you."

The young mother experienced a swift revulsion of feeling. A profound sympathy stirred her for this ungainly fellow-creature, the slave of circumstances, for whom the door of what Ruth now knew to be Eternity was little likely ever to open, unless forced.

Her instinct told her truly that she could best succour the other in her distress by herself seeking aid.

"See, I got the chance to marry, Miss," she began with beautiful awkwardness. "I don't rightly knaw what to be at."

The other's eyes became shrewd and critical.

"D'you like the man?" she asked harshly.

"We fits in pretty fair like," Ruth made answer without enthusiasm.

"Is he fond of the child?" continued the inquisitor.

"O, aye. He fairly dotes on her."

"I should take the chance," said the other with a gasp. "You've got the child. . . . That's the thing that mat-

ters. . . . You must put the child first. . . . Nothing else counts. . . . She'll be the better for a father."

Next Saturday Ernie strolled across the Brooks, as his custom on that evening was, to meet Ruth on her return from milking.

Her course never varied. She milked at the Barton, and carried the milk to the Dower-house. There she emptied her cans and filled them again with water which she carried home to Frogs' Hall to serve the uses of the cottage.

Ernie wandered across Parson's Tye, with the long green-backed clergy-house showing its thatch and black and white timber work above the hedge of *arbor vitae,* and out on to the main road at the sea-ward end of the village.

Here the Dower-house lay on the left of the road behind a wall. A solid building, comfortable and warm, with russet roof and dormer-windows under a dark sycamore, it had changed little maybe since the great days of old when Aldwoldston on the Ruther, with its tannery, its brewery, its river traffic, and procession of pilgrims passing through from Sea-foord to Michelham Priory, had challenged the supremacy of Lewes on the Ouse, and been something of a city when Beachbourne was still but a tiny hamlet on the hill between the sheep-runs of Beau-nez and the snipe-haunted Levels.

Ernie walked soberly along the dry moat that separated the garden-wall from the road. In the middle of the wall was a gate of open ironwork, wrought from Sussex ore, smelted by a Hammer Pond on Ashdown Ridge, and dating from the days when Heathfield was the centre of England's Black Country. The gate, high and narrow, made an eye in the wall with a heavy brow of ivy overhanging it. Ernie crossed the little bridge that spanned the moat between box-hedges, and half-hidden under a lilac against the ivy-covered wall, he peered through the open-work of the gate.

From his feet a long grass-path ran up between rank herbaceous borders to the house, ambushed by trees.

The clink of cans told him he had timed himself aright. At the far end of the walk was a thick bower over which the leaves of a vine, already turning, scrambled.

From the rich darkness of this bower Ruth now emerged,

marching solemnly down the path. Her yoke was on her shoulders, her pails swinging, clanking, slopping.

She walked very deliberately, dressed in the worn earth-coloured gabardine that fell in nobly simple lines about her figure. Her eyes were down, her face grave; and the rakish orange turban wound about her head contrasted strangely with the noble seriousness of her face.

Ernie breathed deep as he watched her coming towards him down the grass-walk under pergolas crowned with roses and honeysuckle. From his covert his eyes followed her with tender content, for he thought she was not aware of his presence. But he was wrong.

A few yards from him, with a graceful dipping motion of the knees, she lowered her shining cans to the ground, disengaged them, and came to him, paler than her wont, the chains of the yoke she still carried now swinging free.

He opened the gate and approached her.

"Ernie," she said with a little sigh, "I'll marry you if you wish it." She paused. Her bosom was heaving, her eyes shuttered. Then she raised her head. "And I'm sure I thank you very much — me and baby."

Hard by a young fig-tree grew against the wall, low-branched and with long-fingered leaves. He drew her beneath the shelter of it, and gathered her slowly in his arms like a sheath of corn. He kissed her patient lips, her eyes; his tears bedewed her cheek; his hand was in hers, and she was kneading it. . . . Both hands were rough with toil.

Then she opened her eyes; and down in the brown deeps of them shone a lovely star.

"I pray I done you no wrong, Ern," she said, and smiled at him through mists.

Tenderly he removed the yoke from her shoulders and placed it on his own.

Then he bowed to the burden, and taking the road trudged solemnly homeward by her side, the cans clinking and water spilling as he moved.

CHAPTER LIX

ALF TRIES TO SAVE A SOUL

OF course there was trouble: Alf saw to that.

It was very seldom he came to Rectory Walk now; but he did come one evening after the news was common property in Old Town.

He marched straight into the kitchen, kicked a chair into its place before the fire, and sat down without a word to his mother. It was dusk in there, but Anne could see that he was terribly moved.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Nothin," Alf answered. "Only my eart's broke."

The mother waited for more, grimly amused.

"He's done it this time," Alf continued at last.

"Who has?"

"Old Ern."

The epithet of affection roused Anne to swift suspicion.

"What's he done then?"

Alf chewed the end of a cigarette.

"Don't ask me," he said. "Talk o the town! — I could 'ide me ead with shyme." He looked up suddenly and stared his mother blankly in the face.

"Little better nor a common you know."

"Common *what*?" asked his mother harshly.

Alf, like many another sinner, had a genuine and almost child-like belief in his mother's innocence and lack of knowledge of those processes of nature with which she might be assumed to be familiar. He raised a deprecatory hand as though to brush her irritably aside.

"You wouldn't understand if I was to tell you," he groaned, screwing up his little yellow face as he did when wrestling in prayer for sinners. "Nor I wouldn't wish you to. My heart's fair broke. That's enough for you." He buried his face in his hands. "He's been a bad brother to me, very bad. Couldn't well ha been worse. Anybody

could tell you that. But blood is blood, and blood is thicker nor what water is, as I'm finding now to my cost."

Anne Caspar came closer.

"Is he goin to marry her?" she asked.

"Ah," said Alf. "And that ain't all. Not by no means — nor the lesser 'alf of it eether."

His mother was still fiercely cold.

"Is she the one he got into trouble?"

Alf evaded her swiftly.

"It ain't *his* child though."

"What?" she snarled. "Is there a brat?"

She turned on the gas.

The tears were rolling down Alf's cheeks as he nodded assent.

"Me own blood-brother and all!" was what he said. "I can't look folks in the face, I can't."

Just then the study-door opened and shut again.

Ernie came out into the darkened passage.

The kitchen-door was wide.

Through it the two brothers stared at each other, Ernie standing in the dusk, Alf sitting in the gas-light.

Then Ernie spoke.

"Tellin the tale, Alf?" he said with quiet irony. Alf waved his brother away.

"You've broke my eart," he said, "and your mother's. Not as you care, not you!"

"If that's all I've broke I ain't done much 'arm, old son," came the still voice out of the dusk; and the outer door shut.

His wife was the one creature in the world to whom Edward Caspar was consistently hard; and her husband the only one to whom Anne was unfailingly considerate.

In her inmost consciousness she knew the reason of her husband's attitude, and bowed to it as to an inexorable ordinance of Nature. Throughout her married life she had paid the penalty of the woman who has taken the lead in matters of sex. Fierce though she was, there were few more old-fashioned than Anne Caspar, and from the start she had seemed to recognize and be resigned to the justice of her fate.

That night as the couple went to bed, Edward said from the dressing-room with a touch of tenderness he rarely showed his wife:

"Mother, Ern's going to be married."

"You needn't tell me," said Anne harshly. "There's a bastard. Did he tell you that?"

It was seldom that Anne allowed herself to indulge in coarseness when addressing her husband.

He gave his familiar little click of disgust, and shut the door between the two rooms.

That night he did not join her but slept, if he slept at all, on the camp-bed in the dressing-room.

Next day, Anne Caspar went round to interview Mrs. Trupp.

The years had brought the two women no nearer, rather the reverse indeed.

Mrs. Trupp was soaring always into heaven: Mrs. Caspar chained to her prison-cell on earth.

"She's a good woman," said Mrs. Trupp of Ruth, with stubborn gentleness. "I don't know a better."

"But she's had a illegitimate child. It's sin! It's wickedness!"

"I know she's made a mistake," replied the other in her even voice. "But it's not for you and me to judge her. You and I were able to marry the men we loved. If we hadn't been. . . ."

"I should have stood up!" harshly.

"You can't say," said Mrs. Trupp, calm as the other was ferocious. "You don't know. We've never been tested." Then the devil entered into her as it does sometimes into the holiest of women, a naughty devil, very mischievous, who loathed Pharisaism and loved to persecute it. . . . *"Besides, should we have been right to stand up?"*

Anne Caspar gasped.

The lady wetted her cotton delicately, and threaded her needle against the dying light.

"It's a nice point," she added in her charming voice.

Anne tramped home, meeting Mr. Pigott on the hill. He stopped to speak to her, but she trudged on surlily.

"The world's gone mad," she said. "It's time it come to an end. It's a bad un."

Mr. Pigott went on to the Manor-house to put his question.

"Is she all right?" he asked —"This girl of Ernie's."

"Right as rain," answered Mrs. Trupp. "But she's had a *rotten* time."

There was no doubt that Alf was deeply stirred by this new happening in his brother's life.

The whole of him resented it with the fury of a baffled sea.

Ern was about to possess a beautiful woman Alf had desired, and Ern was Alf's brother. That deep-seated sense of competition and ineradicable jealousy that exists between members of a family — as profound and disruptive a force as any to be found in human consciousness, dating back as it does to the fierce struggles of nursery days — was at work within him.

As always in moments of conflict, he had recourse to his spiritual director.

The Reverend Spink was a sleek little man, solid in body if not in mind, and full of rather shoddy enthusiasms.

"Poor old Ernie!" said Alf. "He's been a bad brother to me. I will say that for him. But I wouldn't wish my worst friend to come to *that*."

"But you must save him from himself!" cried the curate. "Go out into the highways and hedges and *drag them in!* — that's the command. Fling out the life-line!" and he flung out a plump little arm clothed in best broadcloth to show how it was done.

Alf nodded solemnly.

"Yes," he said. "I'll save him — if he is to be saved." He rose up grandly, loving himself. "Cover me with hinsults; crucify me 'ands and feet; strike me in the face like as not. But I'll face it all. No cross, no crown, as the s'yin is."

He went out on his errand of mercy.

In a few moments he was round at the rooms of the lost sheep.

Ernie was at home.

"You know I wish you well, Ernest, don't you?" he began painfully.

The other had not risen.

"I know all about that," he answered enigmatically.

Alf drew a little nearer and dropped his voice, looking about him.

"You can't marry her, Ern," he whispered.

Ern was quite unmoved.

"Can't I?" he said. "And why not then?"

"*Because you can't!*" Alf almost screamed.

Ernie was still amused.

"I mustn't have her because you can't," he said. "That's the short of it."

Alf cackled horribly.

"Me! — Want her? — I like that."

"I know you did then!"

"Likely!" sneered Alf, his pride swift to arms. "Likely she'd ha took you and said no to me." He pressed closer, his face mottled. "*Do you* know what I'm worth as I stand here in me shoes? I got £3,000 saved away in the Bank, and makin all the time. If I liked I could retire on meself — at 28 — and be a gentleman. That's what I am! That's what I done! That's Alf Caspar! And you tell me she'd ha took up with a dirty coal-porter at 23s. 6d. a week when she could have had *Me!*"

Ernie flared up.

He leapt to his feet.

"Out of it!" he ordered. "What the bloody l's my marriage got to do with you?"

Alf tumbled down the wooden stairs with such a furious clatter as to bring the landlady to the kitchen-door.

Later that evening he reported his brother's saying to the Reverend Spink.

"Swore something fearful!" he said. "I couldn't tell you what he *did* say. I couldn't reelly. Couldn't defile me lips with the words. That's the Army, I suppose. Pick up a lot of dirt there, some of em."

The Reverend Spink, who boasted a moustache he believed to be military, rocked judicially to and fro before the fire. Since he had been ordained a Minister of the Established

Church, and had lived in touch with the Archdeacon and Lady Augusta Willcocks, he felt very profoundly that the maintenance of the aristocratic and imperial tradition had been entrusted to his special keeping.

"Had I not been called to a Higher Service," he said, enunciating his words with the meticulous care of one to whom correct pronunciation has always been a difficulty, "I should have gone into the Army, meself." He added —"An officer, of course."

"Of course," repeated Alf, "as is only befitting a gentleman of your rank and stytion in life. No, I got nothing against the Army. Armies must be, as I tell them, and Navies too — if you're an Island. Only all I say is — *Leave it to others,* I says. You don't want your own family mixed up with *that.*"

But Alf was not done yet.

He went over to Aldwoldston and tried to see Ruth.

She refused, and reported him to Mrs. Trupp, who spoke very seriously to her husband.

"William," she said, "you'll have to sack that man."

He shook his head, grimly amused.

"Can't be done," he replied. "Too interesting a study and too good a chauffeur," but he spoke to Alf all the same.

"You must let that girl be," he said gruffly. "Ern's got her; and he's going to keep her."

"Ah," said Alf, swaggering. "I know what I know, and what no one else don't know, only me; and I don't like it."

"Brothers never do," retorted Mr. Trupp. "Especially if they wanted the girl themselves."

"Ah, 'taint that," said Alf, sour and white. "I shan't marry off the streets, whatever else. No, sir. He's not been a good brother to me — nobody can't throw that up against him. But that's no reason why when I see him askin' for trouble I shouldn't try to save him. Me own blood brother and all."

Mr. Trupp got into the car.

"I'll tell you what," he muttered. "You're a true churchman, Alf, if you're nothing else. I will say that for you."

CHAPTER LX

THE END OF A CHAPTER

THE char-a-banc, called by courtesy a coach, which was bound for what is known locally as "the long drive," waited at Billing's Corner for any Old Town passengers.

It had started from Holywell, and Colonel and Mrs. Lewknor sat beside the driver.

A ramshackle old gentleman came rambling furtively across the road.

The coachman nudged the Colonel.

"That's old Mr. Caspar," he whispered. He had for learning the profound respect of the illiterate. "They say he knows so much he don't know all he do know. Talks Hebrew in his sleep, they say."

The Colonel answered musingly.

"Is that Caspar?" and thought how little this old man had changed from the young man who forty years before had shambled just thus about the courts of Trinity.

The old gentleman, who had the air of being pursued, climbed to his place at the back of the char-a-banc.

Mrs. Lewknor turned. She knew that for some reason Fear had laid hold once more of her Man of Faith.

"Ah, Mr. Caspar!" she called in her gay voice. "I thought it was you! — I forget if you've ever met my husband."

"I knew your boy in India, Mr. Caspar," said the Colonel in his delightful manner. "He was one of the best cricketers in the regiment."

The friendly voices and kind eyes appeared to soothe the old man.

"He's going to be married to-morrow," he panted. "I'm just going over to Aldwoldston to see the lady."

In the village the char-a-banc drew up under the great

chestnut-tree by the market-cross; while the passengers descended for tea in the black-and-white-timbered *Lamb*.

Mr. Caspar, too, got down. Mrs. Lewknor heard him ask the way to Frogs' Hall, and saw him lumber off in that flurried way of his as if pursued.

She followed him into River Lane.

He heard her and turned with eyes aghast behind his gold-rimmed spectacles.

She met him with swiftest sympathy.

"May I come with you, Mr. Caspar?" she asked.

He seemed relieved.

"Yes," he panted, and started off down the steep lane, between the high flint-walls embedded in nettles, at a shuffling trot regardless of the little lady following at his heels.

In the silence she gave him of her strength.

In the Brooks he paused and mooned helplessly across at the river and the hills squandered in the sunshine beyond and the cattle who mooned back.

"This is it," said Mrs. Lewknor in her cool confident voice. "This yellow-washed one, the man said."

"Yes," grunted Edward, once again relieved, and trotted off to the little cottage on the bank beside the willows.

He went up the steps and knocked.

Mrs. Lewknor loitered down to the stream.

Ruth opened. Her visitor glanced at her through dim spectacles; and strength came to him.

"Are you Ruth?" he asked.

The young woman's face lit up.

"Yes, sir," she said. "And I know who you are. I been hopin you might happen along. Come you in and sit down."

The old man mopped his neck.

"I mustn't," he said in tones that meant "I daren't," and continued hurriedly, "I should be getting back. I'm expected home. But I had to come and wish you well." He touched her arm tremulously. "Bless you, my dear! — He's a good lad, only weak." He lowered his voice. "Keep him on the curb a bit," he whispered hurriedly. "But not too much. That's where his mother made her mistake. Drove him away from her."

Mrs. Lewknor, standing by a willow on the river-bank, saw the old man turn.

Slowly she walked across the field to the cottage.

The young woman in the door watched her with uncertain eyes that seemed to leap towards her and then retreat and leap again.

"Is that. . . . That aren't Ern's mother?" she asked.

The lady paused, her fine eyes dwelling on a distant roof.

"No," said Mr. Caspar. "That's a friend."

Mrs. Lewknor, who had the love of her race for beautiful things, allowed her eyes to rest on the noble creature in the door.

"I know your Ernie though," she said charmingly. "He's a very old friend of mine."

The two women exchanged friendly glances and a few words.

Then Edward Caspar and his companion moved off into Parson's Tye.

The church stood four-square on the mound above them, the red tiles of the roof peeping through the trees.

"Shall we go in?" said Mrs. Lewknor.

"Let's," replied the other.

They sat together side by side in the aisle, amid the haunting memories of centuries.

When they emerged the Man of Fear had given place once more to the Child of Faith.

It was a very small party that started next day from Old Town for the wedding.

Besides Mr. and Mrs. Trupp there were in the chocolate-bodied car Mr. and Mrs. Pigott.

The great surgeon was at his surliest.

Mrs. Pigott noted it at once, and of course must take advantage.

"Do you like weddings, Mr. Trupp?" she asked brightly.

"Call it a wedding!" growled the other. "I call it a funeral. It's the end of a good man. He'll go to pieces now he's got all he wants. No: if you want to get the most out of a man, keep him asking. Once he's sated he's done. . . . What does Mrs. Pigott say?"

Mrs. Pigott said:

"Bob the cherry near his lips, but don't let him gobble it." The young woman gave a bird-like toss of her head and threw a teasing glance at her husband. "Bob the cherry. That's it."

When the car swung off the road at the foot of the village into Parson's Tye, Mr. Trupp was in more sober mood.

As the other three crossed the green to the church, he lingered behind.

"Comin in then, Alf?" he asked.

The chauffeur shook his head.

"I know's too much, sir," he said firmly. "No good won't come of evil — as ever I heard tell."

Mr. Trupp rolled away, coughing.

"Alf turned moralist!" he muttered.

The pair were to be married in church. For Ruth herself was "church" in the sense the working-class understand that word. Miss Caryll had taken considerable pains to effect her conversion, while her people, with the quiet tolerance of their kind, had made no objection.

Ruth herself had been profoundly indifferent, and underwent the change mainly to oblige. But while she rarely attended divine service herself, and was neither interested in the religious community to which she belonged nor affected by it, on the vital occasions of her life she expected it to do its duty by her — to marry her, bury her, baptize and confirm her children; and she would have been astonished and aggrieved had it refused her the rites which were in her judgment her due.

The great church with its hollow-timbered roof like the bottom of an upturned ship, its bell-ropes looped and hanging from the central tower above the transept, is called by some the Cathedral of the Downs.

It was quiet now as a forest at evening, and empty save for Mr. and Mrs. Boam, straight-backed in black, Ruth sitting subdued between her father and mother, little Alice on her Granny's lap, and Ernie alone in the pew upon the right.

There was about the little gathering something of the solemnity of the hills which hemmed them round.

Mrs. Trupp, walking in the stillness up the aisle, was aware of it as she took her place at Ernie's side.

Then in the silence the singing voice of a little child floated out like a silver bubble of sound.

"Daddy," it said.

Ruth shot at the man across the aisle a sudden lovely look of affection and intimate confidence; and one soul at least, kneeling there in the sunshine, felt that the word sealed the covenant between this wayfaring couple, still only starting on their pilgrimage, as no offices of any priest could do.

THE END

Doubleday, Page & Co. hope to publish *One Woman: being the sequel to Two Men,* next spring.

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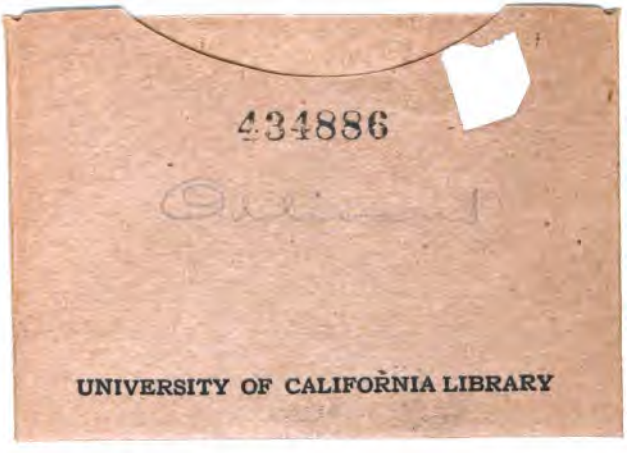

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